

Aiveney of the Theological Seminary

PRINCETON, N. J.

Presented by Mr. Samuel Agnew of Philadelphia, Pa.

Jamieson, Robert, 1802-1880 The manners and trials of the primitive Christians BR 165 . J35 1841









MANNERS AND TRIALS

OF THE

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

THE REV. ROBERT JAMIESON,

SECOND EDITION.

EDINBURGH:

JOHN JOHNSTONE, HUNTER SQUARE.

MDCCCXLI.

ENTERED IN STATIONERS' HALL.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED BY JOHN JOHNSTONE, HIGH STREET.



THE Author of the following Volume was led, several years ago, to direct his attention to the Christians of the three first centuries, under the impression, that if ever pure and genuine Christianity existed to any great extent among men, it would be found exemplified in the character and state of those who were contemporaries of the Apostles, or lived in the age immediately succeeding. The interest of the study increased as he advanced; and he felt, that while there was a great deal to admire, and some things also to condemn, these inquiries into the habits and state of the primitive believers, formed altogether one of the most delightful and improving pursuits in which he had ever engaged. It carly occurred to him, that this was a part of the history of the Church with which the Christian public of the present day were not so well acquainted as it was desirable they should be; and that, as the knowledge of it was for the most part either locked up in the secrets of dead languages, or scattered over voluminous works, where it was mixed up with the dry and uninviting details of theological controversy, it might be a useful undertaking to embody, in an accessible form, all that was necessary

to give a popular view of the history of the primitive Christians. Accordingly, he imposed this task on himself, and on surveying the field of illustration before him, the subject appeared naturally to divide itself into two branches—the first descriptive of the private, domestic, and social manners of the primitive Christians—embracing every thing necessary to exhibit a picture of their every-day life; and the second, of those extraordinary trials which, for three hundred years, formed the portion of all who lived godly in Christ Jesus. This is the order he has followed in the arrangement of the Work, and he flatters himself, that while he has been studious of brevity and condensation, his Volume will be found to contain every particular necessary to afford a full and accurate view of the Christians of the primitive age.

The Author has freely gleaned his materials from every quarter; but it is due to himself to say, that while he has availed himself of the labours of modern writers, and frequently quoted from them, he has, with minute and patient industry, tested almost every statement contained in his book with the original authorities,—the historians and apologists of the three first centuries.

CURRIE MANSE, 13th November 1839.

CONTENTS.

										Page
NTRODUCTION.	-	**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1:

MANNERS

OF

THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

CHAPTER I.

PRIVATE MANNERS.

Christians lived generally like other men-Peculiarities from their vicinity to Heathens-Dress-Furniture-Pagan ornaments made Christian Symbols-Diet-Story of Alcibiades-Reading Scriptures, and singing, during meals-Prayer the grand principle of their life -Fasts-Story of Fructuosus-Instances of extraordinary knowledge of Scriptures-Great care of Religious Education of the Young-School-Books-Use of the sign of the Cross very common-Story of Origen-Sacrifices of Diocletian-Amusements-Condemned dice-Ornamenting outside of houses-Very silent, - 27

CHAPTER II.

PRIVATE MANNERS CONTINUED.

p_a	ge
Particular employments abjured—Idol-making—Astrology and Magic	
- Actors - Case of a Teacher of acting - Story of a person being seized	
with mortal sickness in the Theatre-Gladiators-Story of Alypius	
-Civil and Military Officers-Story of Marcellus-Provision for	
such as were obliged to abandon their Trade-Espousals-Mar-	
riage,	57

CHAPTER III.

SOCIAL MANNERS.

Mutual love and concord of the Primitive Christians—Care of the Poor—Contributions by Foreign Churches—Story of Numidian Captives—Care of the Sick—Female Visitors—Parabolani—Contrast between the benevolence of Christians and the selfishness of Heathens—Story of the Plague in Carthage—And in Alexandria—Story of Paulinus—Care of Christian Prisoners—Story of Pergrinus—Christians in the Mines—Care of the spiritual interests of men—Various manifestations of Christian benevolence—Means of supporting it—Story of a person bequeathing money to the Poor—Love-feasts—Hospitality—Salutations—Oaths—Story—Patience in bearing injuries—Lovalty—Tribute to the social virtues of the Primitive Christians by two Heathen Emperors,

CHAPTER IV.

75

MANNERS IN REGARD TO PUBLIC WORSHIP.

P	Places for Public Worship-Upper rooms-Heathen Temples con-
	verted into Churches-And how-Area-Fountain-Porch-Dif-
	ferent classes of Worshippers sat apart-Places for reading the
	Scriptures—Texts on walls—Historical Pictures—Vigils—Morning
	and Evening Service-Lord's Day kept as a Festival-Routine of
	Service 10

CHAPTER V.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO PUBLIC WORSHIP CONTINUED.

Page

Communion celebrated every Lord's Day, afterwards daily—Free-will Offerings—Manner of celebration—Sent to the absent—Given to Infants—Celebrated in private houses every morning, or with Strangers—Classes of Catechumens—Mysteries—Baptism administered at first in any place—Afterwards in Church—Generally by immersion—Clinick Baptism—Deferred often till death—Reason of this—Horror felt from wanting it during a storm—Story of Nazianzen—Importance attached to the person by whom, and the place in which, it was dispensed—Annual Scasons for Baptizing—Ceremonies attending it—Anecdote of an African Slave—Public Confession of Faith—White Garments—Change of name,

CHAPTER VI.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO DISCIPLINE.

Severity of Discipline—Tenderness and Sorrow for the Offender—
Tremendous effects of Excommunication—Humiliating Postures at the Gate of the Church—Duration of Banishment from the Church—Solemn manner of restoring Offenders—The reason of so severe and protracted Discipline—Impartiality of it—Story of Theodosius,

CHAPTER VII.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO THE DEAD.

Death of Christians called their Birth—Indifference and Barbarity of Heathens—Burial first introduced by the Christians—Importance attached to it—Motives that led to a religious attention to the Dead—Zeal in giving Burial to Martyrs whose bodies were rescued—Bought—Carried to distant Sepulchres—Description of the Funeral Obsequies of the Christians—Use of Perfumes—Watching the Corpse—Funeral Procession—Service at the Grave—Anniversary of Death of private Christians—And of Martyrs—Festivals—Cemeteries—Conclusion,

TRIALS

OF

THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

CHAPTER I.

Page

Introductory Remarks—Persecutions—By the Jews—The Greeks—The Roman Emperors—Nero—Domitian—Trajan—Hadrian—Marcus Aurelius—Septimius Severus and Caracalla, - - 193

CHAPTER II.

Persecution by Maximinus of Thrace-By Decius-Court of Inquisition-Safety sought by Flight, and Indulgence purchased by some with Money-Letter of Dionysius-Martyrdom of Julian-Trial of Dioscarus-Singular Fate of Numidicus-Woman forced to Sacrifice by her Husband-Severe sufferings by the Ministers-Cyprian proscribed-His flight-Chæremon captured by the Saracens-Paul -The first Hermit - Tragi-comic Fate of Dionysius - Unhappy consequences of the Decian Persecution-Short but persecuting reign of Gallus-Valerian-Influence of the Astrologer Macrianus exerted against the Christians-Valerian banishes the Bishops-Great activity and success in their exile-Labours of Cyprian and Dionysius-Publication of new and severer Edict-Severities at Rome-Martyrdom of Sextus in a Cemetery, and of Cyprian at Carthage-Death of Valerian, and Tranquillity of the Church-Its growing Numbers, but decline in Piety-Beginning of Diocletian's Persecution-Auguries-Resignation of multitudes of Soldiers-Marcellus-Savage disposition of Galerius-Heresies of the Manichees-Entertainments of Romula-Churches demolished-Scriptures burnt-Indiscreet zeal and severe punishment of a Christian -Barbarities in the Palace-In Numidia-Rome-Antioch-Case of Romanus-Searching for Scriptures-Concealment of them-Readers-Fate of one in Numidia, and of Felix-Indiscretion of some Christians-Cowardice of others-Barbarities of Maximin-Case of Apphian-Agapius fighting with a Bear-Milder edict of Galerius-Artful policy of Maximin.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

CHAPTER III.

									P	age
Number	of	Persecutions	uncertain-	-Marty	rdom	of	Apo	lloni	ıs, a	
Roman	Ser	ator-Trials	from opposi	tion of	Philo	sop	hy—C	of P	riests	
Symj	phoi	rosa — Sympho	orianus — P	opular	outra	iges	-Tri	als	from	
Relativ	es a	nd Friends-	Anecdotes,	-	-		-	-	-	268

CHAPTER IV.

Christians accused of introducing a New Religion—Mankind naturally averse to what is new—Romans particularly jealous of any Novelties in Religion—Christians accused of holding Illegal Assembles—Of forming Conspiracies—These charges first arose from their not partaking in public rejoicings, and from indiscretion of some Christians—Anecdotes—Christians accused of being useless members of society—Of being Atheists—Of being the occasion of public calamities—Of gross immoralities and horrid crimes—Of being poor and ignorant,

CHAPTER V.

Extreme anxiety of Magistrates and of Priests to ensnare Christians into Idolatry—Different motives of each—Snares laid to induce them to acknowledge the gods, to part with the Scriptures, or to read them only at certain times, and on certain terms—To get them to Sacrifice—Sprinkling goods in the market—Meats prepared not by cooks, but priests—Evangelical liberty in eating meats offered to idols—Courageous remonstrance to Julian—Polluting Fountains—Bowing to Statues of gods and emperors—Swearing by the emperor's genius—Training Christians to box—Tempations to Licentiousness.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

CHAPTER VI.

Page

Various modes of punishment—Imprisonment—The Stocks—Origen
—The Horse—Mutilation—The Mines—Baths of Diocletian—Hardships endured in the Mines—Brief respite—Many of the most eminent Bishops and private Christians maimed in various ways—Fighting with wild beasts—Clothed in skins of dogs, asses, &c.—Fondness of the Romans for those combats—Ignatius, Agapius—The Cross—The Apostle Andrew—Martyrs in Egypt—Crucifying with head downwards—Throwing dead bodies into rivers—Leaving them a prey to birds and ravenous beasts—Mingling the bones of Christians with those of lower animals—Reducing them to ashes—Various methods of doing this—Pitchy coats—Iron Chair—The Wheel—Various other punishments—The Rack—Bithynian Governor—Martyrs—Confessors—Suicides—Criminals pretending to be Christians—Estimate of the number of Martyrs,

CHAPTER VII.

Notices of eminent Martyrs—Polycarp—Ptolemy and Lucius—Persecution at Lyons—Biblias—Fructuosus—Perpetua and Felicitas—Cyprian—Cyril—Sapricius and Nicephorus—Romanus—Euplius—Maximus—Irenæus—Philip—Martyrs of Cæsårea—Felix, - 3

CHAPTER VIII.

Sources of stedfastness in Martyrs—Story of a Phrygian apostate—Love of Christ—Firm hope of immediate entrance into heaven—Effects of the courage and Christian virtues of the Martyrs upon many beholders—Informer against the Apostle James—Justin Martyr—Besas, a soldier—Gesenius, an actor—Treatment of those who fell—Certificates of Martyrs—Celerinus—Certificates disapproved of—Oreat value attached to Martyrdom—Concluding Remarks,



INTRODUCTION.

In the early history of the Christian Church, a story is told of seven noble youths of Ephesus, who, when a severe persecution broke on the Christians of that city, fled from the scene of suffering, and took refuge in a spacious cavern on the side of a neighbouring mountain. They had not long established themselves in that wild and lonely retreat, when they all simultaneously fell into a deep and death-like slumber; and they continued, as the legend runs, in that state of torpor and insensibility for nearly two hundred years, when they at length awoke, and perceiving every where around the signs of tranquillity and order, they ventured, with timid and cautious steps, to return to their native city. Wandering along its streets and alleys, with which they were so familiar, and which they fancied it was but yesterday they had left, they were astonished to find them occupied by a race totally different, in language, dress, and manners, from what they had been accustomed to witness; and the farther they penetrated into the heart of it, the more they felt themselves strangers in the dwellingplace of their fathers,—as much so as if they had alighted among the inhabitants of another world. But nothing in the altered state of the town so greatly surprised them as the spectacle of its public buildings. On one of the entrance gates, which they remembered had been surmounted by a statue of Diana, the tutelary goddess of the place, they beheld the emblem of a gilded cross. Here—they passed edifices, rising in stately grandeur, and rich in all the graces of architectural ornament, which bore to be dedicated to the honour of Jesus, or were inscribed with the name of one or other of his apostles; and there-seminaries of education were planted, in which were taught the elements of that faith which, at the time of their flight, it had been a capital crime to avow. The whole appearance of the city conveyed the impression that some singular revolution had taken place in the religious persuasion of the people, and that the adherents of the Gospel, whom they had left a despised and persecuted sect, were living in the free and open enjoyment of their principles and their worship. Longing to hear the origin and extent of this happy turn of affairs, and to gratify themselves with the company of persons whose feelings and habits were akin to their own, they made up to one of the passengers, and eagerly inquired, "Where the Christians were to be found?" "Christians!—we are all Christians here!" was the stranger's reply. Their joy was now complete, and it drew from them involuntary exclamations of praise. But their pleasure was destined to be only a momentary transport; for, instead of meeting with persons whose hearts were knit together in faith and love, and with whom they could take sweet counsel on the hopes and the blessedness of the better country, a little observation painfully convinced them, that the people to whom they were introduced were as thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the world, and as eager in the pursuit of its pleasures, as the wretched idolaters whose place they had filled. In short, they found, that if Christianity had extended its influence through the adoption of its form by the inhabitants at large, the ascendancy was dearly purchased at the expense of its principles and its spirit; and that the great majority of those who had professedly come over to the true religion, possessed—if a few outward observances were excepted—none of the distinguishing attributes of Christians but the name. Their disappointment was now as bitter and painful as their anticipations, from the altered habits of the citizens, had been sanguine and high. Returning to their cave, they prayed earnestly to be removed from a people in whose uncongenial society they found little scope for the exercise of Christian piety and love; and God at length heard and granted their petition, by translating them to a better world, there to mingle with the sainted martyrs and believers of the earlier and purer gene-

ration to which they had belonged.

This fable—for fable it is—whose excellent moral has preserved it from the oblivion to which most of the legends of the fathers are deservedly consigned, was probably the production of some zealous Christian of the third century, who mourned over the sad departure of his contemporaries from the purity of primitive times, and who called in the assistance of fiction to rebuke more effectually their growing disposition to substitute for the spirit and power of religion a superstitious observance of its forms. In this respect the story is interesting and valuable, as it embodies the tradition of an age not far removed from that of the apostles and their immediate followers, that those who in early times assumed the name of Christian, stood out in strong relief from the general mass of society, by the spirituality of their tempers, and the high-toned morality of their lives. But there is no need to appeal to the doubtful authority of fable or tradition, when there has been conveyed to us, through a thousand channels, the most sure and unchallengeable evidence, that the Christians of the first ages, while they lived in the world according to the flesh, lived altogether above and out of it in spirit; and though it would be a false and exaggerated statement, which represented any period in the history of fallen man

as a golden age of purity, we have the concurring testimony of friends and foes, that the Church, during the three first centuries, exhibited a state of society which, for the wide and permanent influence of pure morality and genuine religion, stands in singular contrast to all other associations that have ever existed in the world. In the annals of that remarkable period, we meet with memorials, not of solitary individuals here and there, whose rare exhibition of moral excellence raised them, like lofty pyramids, above the ordinary level of their age, but of a vast and indiscriminate multitude of believers of every age, sex, and condition, who exemplified in a manner and a measure hitherto unknown to the world, all the sanctities of religion, and all the charities of life; and when we take into account the manifold disadvantages which birth, education, and all the prevailing habits of society, placed in the way of their acquiring the Christian character at all, the splendid moralities imputed to them would appear almost incredible, if we did not recollect the source whence all their virtues were derived. period were the effects of the Gospel, on the walk and conversation of men, more striking, than at their first developement; for then the contrast between the purity of a Christian, and the gross and demoralizing manners of a heathen idolater, forced itself on every observer; and the spectacle of selfish and narrow-minded Jews, expanding into a spirit of universal benevolence, or of men, born and bred in such cities as Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome, where every form of corruption and vice was almost interwoven with the elements of their nature, not only keeping their garments unspotted by the flesh, but arrayed with an assemblage of virtues greater than the purest philosophers of antiquity had ever dreamed of, was a phenomenon viewed with universal astonishment by the heathen world. But it is not merely when contrasted with the moral darkness amid which they shone, that the virtues of the early

Christians appear bright and attractive: they command our admiration by their native lustre. And when we read of the devotion with which they gave themselves to every thing that was pure, and honest, and just, and lovely, and of good report,-when we read of the golden thread of piety that ran through the whole web of their characters and lives, -of the holy habits of faith and love which they carried into all the walks of private and of public life, -of their constancy and patience under trials of no common magnitude, -and of the noble sacrifices they were ever ready to make at the call of duty,—we are introduced to a series of moral achievements, which, even at the distance of many centuries, and after all the progress of Christianity in the world, seem more like the creations of romance, than the transactions which sober history records, and which will for ever remain a lasting monument of the mighty power of the Gospel to elevate and sanctify the nature of man.

Such were the admirable virtues of those who first bore the Christian name; and although the same features of character are possessed in common with them, by all who, at any time, are animated by the faith and holiness of the Gospel, yet the broad and splendid scale on which, from peculiar circumstances, they were then exhibited, have rendered them objects of attraction, to which succeeding ages have ever turned as constituting the brightest spot in the history of the Church. The same causes which called forth, in so public and glorious a manner, the holy excellencies that distinguished the primitive Christians, originated a variety of customs peculiar to the first ages of the Church, without a knowledge of which it is impossible to form a right estimate of the piety and zeal of our religious ancestors. Among these customs, there were some, of which no account could be given, and no reason assigned for the observance, except that they were traditionally received from the times of the apostles,

whence a persuasion of their venerable origin, and the experience of their being eminently favourable to the promotion of piety, procured their adoption, by common consent, into the practice of all who revered such high authority and example. But in the great majority of instances, the peculiarities of custom that came to prevail among the primitive Christians, were the gradual offspring of their circumstances, and-in the different states in which their society subsistedin the smallness of their numbers, or their progressive increase—in the sudden alternations of prosperity and adversity, of peace and danger, which, for many ages, they experienced—in the warm sensibilities, and the forward uncompromising zeal of the Christians at first—in the well-intended and ingenious devices, by which they afterwards learned to conceal from their heathen neighbours the objects and lessons of Christian faith, under the emblems of pagan superstitionin the secret tokens by which they maintained an intercourse with friends at a distance, and in the elaborate and anxious means they adopted to preserve the purity of Christian society, by the admission of none but those who had given long and decisive evidence of the sincerity of their faith and virtue,-we can trace the origin of that system of public and private manners, which is inseparably associated with the earliest age of the Church. In the course of the following work, frequent opportunities will be afforded of illustrating all the various circumstances included under this observation; but, in the meantime, it may be useful to specify three grand causes, that seem to have had the most powerful influence in forming the customs and manners of the primitive Christians.

At the time when Christianity burst on the attention of men, idolatry was the prevailing religion of by far the greatest part of the world; and so much was it interwoven with the whole framework of society, that scarce an object could be found in public or pri-

vate life—scarce a matter of business transacted, the slightest recreation enjoyed, or the most common forms of social intercourse observed, without encountering some manifestation of paganism. Multitudes of those who embraced the new religion had been brought up in the practice, and were familiar with all the abominations of idolatry; and it was natural that, after they had become persuaded of the folly and unlawfulness of heathen worship, and were fully alive to the criminality of participating in the simplest of its observances, they should strive to place themselves beyond the risk of being again contaminated by the unholy thing. Under the strong impression which the new and solemn discoveries of Christianity had made on the minds of the believers, all the energies of their nature were roused and directed towards the progress and establishment of religion in their souls. constant fight they had to maintain not only against the principles of their corrupt nature within, but against the prevailing course of every-day life without, necessarily gave rise to a variety of customs and observances which might have the effect of keeping them in remembrance of spiritual purity, by the recurrence of new and contrary habits. All the customs they adopted, and the ceremonies they practised at that early period, were exclusively such as were of spiritual use, and designed for pious ends; and while the primitive believers held only the same principles, and manifested only the same spirit that Christians are called to do in all ages, a peculiar tone of manners was gradually superinduced by the necessity of keeping their faith and virtue constantly alive and inviolate by the practices of the heathen, who on all sides surrounded them.

Seasons of persecution imposed a new necessity on the Christians, of shaping their outward manners to the altered spirit of the times. Objects of imperial vengeance or popular hatred, because they would not,

and could not abandon their faith, -they were obliged to observe the most profound secrecy in practising the duties, and enjoying the privileges of their religion. Friends maintained their intercourse, and strangers recognised their brethren by tokens and signs, which formed the watchwords of the Christian community. From a dread of being betrayed, their assemblies were held under the darkness of the catacombs, or in the solitude of the deserts. From a laudable desire of preserving a high tone of faith and morality, the holiest of their rites were withheld from all, until they were tried by a course of protracted and laborious training; and hence, the forms, the seasons, the place, and all the accompaniments of their worship being varied as circumstances required, gave rise to observances and forms, which continued to be retained long after the necessity that led to them had passed away.

Intervals of tranquillity and peace to the Christians, afforded an occasion still more prolific than the season of trials, for the formation of their peculiar customs and manners. No longer hunted by the sword of persecution, nor exposed to the public dangers of torture or the stake, they had still unabated warfare to wage in private with the votaries of the ancient religion. So long as Christianity was not the religion of the majority, nor recognised by the written laws of the empire, the tolerant spirit of the government could not always exempt its disciples from a thousand annoyances in every-day life. The bitter malice and resentment of the priests and other parties interested in upholding the influence of existing superstitions, the blind zeal of the common people, ever ready for the greatest excesses against the Christians, and the uncertain humour of the inferior magistrates, jealous of the least infringement of their authority, and often too secretly disposed to countenance the rabble in their hostility to the followers of the new sect, might, on the slightest occasion, fasten on them charges which

led to an abridgment of their privileges, and a fresh persecution of their faith. In these circumstances, the Christians, with a view to insure the more free and public profession of their religion, and avoid as much as possible offending their Pagan fellow-subjects, sought to combine the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove, by retaining many of the usages and emblems belonging to paganism, and giving them a different meaning, known only and studiously kept to themselves. While the Christians of the first century recoiled with horror from whatever was known to have the remotest connection with idolatry, their followers in the two succeeding centuries, thought that many things, which, from time immemorial, had been regarded as exclusively within the province of heathenism, were susceptible of a new appropriation, and that although by their ancient and established use, they were diametrically opposed to the entire spirit and requirements of Christianity, it was possible to give them such a different application, as would bring them into perfect harmony with the religion of Jesus. By this plan of accommodation, objects of familiar and daily use among the pagans, and which were regarded by them as the emblems of their deities and worship, were made symbolical of the parables and doctrines of the Gospel. Many of the most noted and favourite practices, with new and purely spiritual allusions attached to them, were adopted into the system of Christian observance, and numberless devices and ornaments engraven on the architecture, the furniture, and other property of the heathens, were converted into symbols of the Christian faith, "by such new appropriations of them, as, while causing those who used them to appear Gentiles to the Gentile, should enable them to be known as Christians by the Christian." *

Enough has now been said in these introductory observations, to satisfy the reader, who may not have

^{*} Hope's Architecture.

been previously acquainted with the state of the early followers of Jesus, that a variety of customs did prevail in their society peculiar to themselves; and that although, from the diffusive nature of Christianity, which is capable of subsisting in every form of society, and imparting its own sanctified spirit to all the institutions of civil life, no necessity was imposed on its disciples to adopt any other observances, except such as were required by the laws and ordinances of the Gospel, yet the circumstances in which the primitive Christians found themselves, naturally led to the introduction among them of a system of manners totally different from what has ever been exhibited by the adherents of the same faith in any succeeding age. As a branch, therefore, of the history of the Church, the study of the customs and manners of the primitive Christians, is both interesting and important. On Christians of every name and every denomination, who unite in revering them as their religious ancestors, it has the strongest claims; and if a delineation of the manners of the successive races that have peopled his native island is hailed with interest by every enlightened and patriotic inhabitant of Britain, -if a knowledge of the antiquities of Greece and Rome is justly accounted an indispensable part of a liberal education,—if a general acquaintance with the forms of society that prevail amongst all the people of the world, is eagerly sought after by those who love to study human nature in its thousand varieties,—surely to know something of the peculiar manners of the primitive Christians, cannot but be an object of desire by every friend to morality and religion, who considers how splendid, in both these respects, were the character and attainments of those early followers of The gratification of a liberal curiosity, however, is not the only advantage of the study. It is strongly recommended by its utility: and as the best and wisest instructors of mankind always endeavour

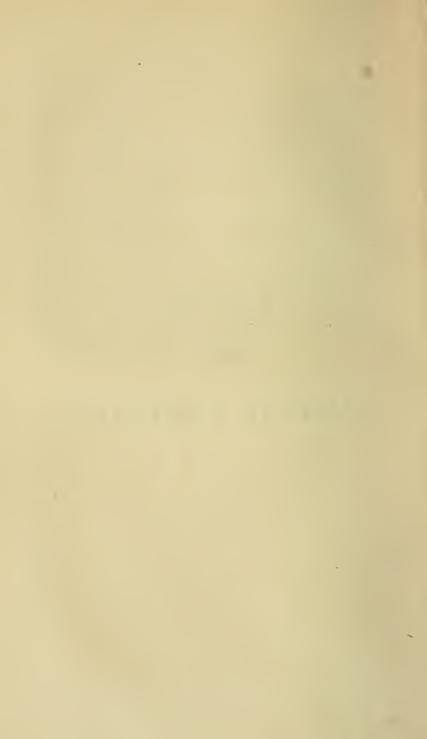
to fortify their counsels of wisdom and virtue, by appealing to those who were eminent for the excellencies they wish to inculcate, few subjects of inquiry can be more beneficial to Christians, than that which holds up to their admiration, and makes familiar to their minds, the principles and habits of their ancient predecessors in the faith. In all their manners and customs, which were the gradual offspring of their situation, and were at first resorted to, in simplicity and godly sincerity, either as bulwarks for the defence, or auxiliaries to the promotion of their faith and virtue, we trace the workings of an intense desire to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour; and even those of their observances, which discover the shadows as well as the lights of Christian life-which savour of a sprinkling of superstition, and border on ascetic severity, it were unjust to ascribe to a less purer element than the same zeal for godliness. In studying the private and public institutions of the primitive Church, then, a reverence for the memory of the early Christians, as well as love for historical truth, requires us to direct our chief regard to the spirit by which these were pervaded; and, while we view them successively exhibited amid the scenes of family retirement, in the social intercourse of life, in the sacred offices of public worship, and in the usages observed towards the dying, the destitute, and the dead,—to examine them less with the eye of antiquarian curiosity, than with the desire of discovering the external forms by which the primitive believers expressed their principles, and kept these in lively exercise. Such a view of them cannot but be highly instructive. shall find, indeed, that it introduces us to the knowledge of sentiments regarding intercourse with the world, which could result only from a peculiar state of society, and of customs that were established in opposition to scenes that have no longer any parallel amongst us. But it should not, on that account, be

the less interesting, when we remember that the sentiments and customs described were the distinguishing traits of those who first trod the path of Christian duty, and who are held up as patterns to every subsequent period of the Church. A difference of circumstances happily exempts us from the necessity of resorting to the self-same means of protecting and cherishing our faith and virtue. But as the manners and customs that prevailed amongst them were obviously no more than the external manifestations of that spirit of piety that reigned in their hearts, and which led them to make it the ambition and glory of their lives to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, it cannot but tend to our profit to make ourselves familiar with a subject so interesting as that which professes to delineate the admirable virtues of the primitive Christians.

MANNERS

OF THE

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.



CHAPTER I.

PRIVATE MANNERS.

CHRISTIANS LIVED GENERALLY LIKE OTHER MEN—PECULIARITIES FROM THEIR VICINITY TO HEATHENS—DRESS—FURNITURE—PAGAN ORNA-MENTS MADE CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS — DIET — STORY OF ALCIBIADES—READING SCRIPTURES, AND SINGING, DURING MEALS—PRAYER THE GRAND PRINCIPLE OF THEIR LIFE—FASTS—STORY OF FRUCTUOSUS—INSTANCES OF EXTRAORDINARY KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURES—GREAT CARE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG—SCHOOL-BOOKS—USE OF THE SIGN OF THE CROSS VERY COMMON—STORY OF ORIGEN—SACRIFICES OF DIOCLETIAN—AMUSEMENTS—CONDEMNED DICE—ORNAMENTING OUTSIDE OF HOUSES—VERY SILENT.

Among the primitive disciples, Christianity made no essential difference in their relations to society and the external world, more than it does among their followers in the present day. Apart from the faith they had embraced, and the altered estimate it led them to form of the scenes and the pleasures of the world, their new views occasioned no change in their rank, their profession, or their outward circumstances in life. In general, they lived like other men around them-speaking the same language, partaking of the same fare, observing the same intervals of labour and repose, and in every thing that was honourable, pure, and of good report, conforming to the rules and the habits which custom had established. The mechanic wrought at his trade, the husbandman prosecuted the labours of the field, the merchant repaired to his shop. the soldier continued in the ranks, -men went, from day to day, and from place to place, obeying the calls

of business and friendship as before; and, instead of separating from their former acquaintance, or withdrawing into solitude from the avocations to which they had been bred and by which they lived, they gave no symptoms, in any of these respects, of a change of habits, except that, being furnished with higher motives, they attended with an activity, a diligence, and fidelity greater than ever, to all the claims of society and the offices of life. In the earliest times, indeed, when persecutions were frequent and severe, there were many Christians, male and female, married and unmarried, who, justly persuaded that nothing should come in competition with their fidelity to Christ, and fearing, at the same time, their own inability to remain stedfast and immovable amid the fiery trials by which they were assailed, resolved on abandoning for a time their place and possessions in the world, and fleeing to distant mountains and inaccessible deserts, where they spent their time in the service of God, and continued, at a distance from temptations to apostasy, the exercises of meditation and prayer. But when peace was restored, and the profession of Christianity was no longer proscribed and dangerous, this measure of prudence was no longer resorted to. Those who had found it expedient, for the preservation of their Christian fidelity, to take such a step, quitted their temporary retirement; and although there were some who, having come, through habit, to prefer a solitary life, remained in their adopted habitations in the wilderness, the great majority of these voluntary exiles returned to the circle of their families and friends, and mingled as before in the wonted scenes and activities of life. Indeed, it was no part of the creed of the primitive Christians, that on embracing the religion of Jesus, they were required to give up all concern in the secular business, or to become dead to the comforts and innocent enjoyments of the world. On the contrary, instead of thinking, with many of

DRESS. 29

the philosophers and visionaries of both ancient and modern times, that it was the perfection of wisdom and virtue to go out of it, they believed that Christianity shed a sanctifying influence over all the relations, and habits, and transactions of life. Feeling deeply the debt of gratitude they owed to their Creator, they despised not the sober and moderate enjoyment of any of his gifts; and, animated by the sublime motive of consecrating their time, their talents, and the whole powers of their nature to the service of Christ, they were ready, above all classes of their contemporaries, to occupy themselves with the ordinary business, and, when it did not violate their fidelity to their Divine Master, to participate in the ordinary

indulgencies of life.

Situated, however, as they were among a people, where all the forms of life, and many of its pursuits and pleasures were more or less connected with the service of paganism, and with the strong impressions they had newly received, that religion was their allimportant concern, it is not to be wondered at that their ideas of duty should be severe, and their habits should be tinged with peculiarities in regard to many things, which Christians in a more favourable state of society would regard as allowable and innocent. thing, for example, may appear more purely a matter of indifference, than the choice of the fashion and colour of dress; and yet, in the circumstances of the primitive Christians, articles of that nature did acquire such an importance in their eyes, that they gradually fell into a style of clothing peculiar to themselves. Not that they affected any singularities in their personal appearance—for their habiliments were made and worn in the ordinary fashion of the time and place,—and Christians, whether they were found in the high, the middle, or the lower ranks, were accustomed to equip themselves in a manner suitable to the decencies of the state or profession to which they

belonged. But, looking to the moral influence of dress, desirous of avoiding every thing that might minister to vanity, or lead the wearer to forget, in attending to the outward man, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, they studiously rejected all finery as unbecoming the humility of their character, and confined themselves to a suit of apparel, remarkable, not so much for the plainness of the material, as for the absence of all superfluous ornament. Every thing gaudy or sumptuous, that partook of the costly stuffs, or the crimsoned dyes that suited the luxurious taste of the times, was discountenanced by the spirituallyminded followers of Christ; and, though many of them were entitled, by birth or otherwise, to appear in the flowing folds of the graceful toga, yet, even that favourite garb, while it was retained for the valuable privileges it conferred, was looked upon as too gay and splendid for ordinary use, and was by most, if not by all the Christians, laid aside for the common pallium or cloak, to which the preference was given, on account of the air of greater modesty and gravity that was supposed to belong to it. over, among the Christians of the East, the custom early prevailed of wearing garments of no other colour than white, -in order that they might carry about with them a perpetual memorial of the purity of character that became their profession; and there were others in various parts of the world, who thought it their duty to carry the imitation of Christ to the extent of wearing the meanest and most common attire of one in the form of a servant. But neither of these extravagances met with very general countenance; and the greater part contented themselves with a dress, free from all approach to gaudiness and pomp, betraying no symptoms of an anxious and elaborate decoration of the person, and conspicuous only for its neat and cleanly appearance.

There was the greater reason for the Christians

DRESS. 31

observing this simplicity and precision in matters of dress, that their contemporaries were universally noted for their grossly effeminate and superstitious attention to personal ornament. The garments both of Jews and Gentiles were overloaded with devices and figures of embroidery, which were worn by all ranks, partly from the love of show, partly because they were wrought into those shapes deemed most efficacious in resisting the assaults of magic, and the influence of the evil eye. The one had their tunics richly fringed with scraps of Scripture, in letters of gold; and the other had theirs decorated with various emblems of their worship,—which, with both classes, were used for the double purpose of amulets to protect them from danger, and of ornaments to gratify an insatiable appetite for splendour and extravagance. Besides, in other parts of their dress, they were no less luxurious and fond of display. The men studied all the arts of effeminacy, by painting their beards, and covering their temples and shoulders with artificial curls, in imitation of women, and besmearing their clothes with fragrant perfumes; the women courted attraction not only by the richness and splendour of their robes, but by a dazzling profusion of pearls, and pendants of gold and silver; and so much had this rage for finery then infected the whole Roman world, that even the people of the middle and common ranks never appeared abroad, but in dresses of the most costly and ostentatious description.* Against all such meretricious ornaments the primitive Christians lifted up the silent testimony of their example; and, while they affected no peculiarities in the form and style of their clothing, they showed the superior excellence of their principles and their taste; -in their men and their women attiring themselves with a decent propriety, equally removed from the extremes of elaborate decoration and sordid negligence. So well was this known to be a distin-

^{*} Meursius de luxuria Romanorum.

guishing feature in their practice, that the first public tokens of a heathen's conversion to Christianity, were frequently given by the change on his outward man; and a criminal who once come to trial under the assumed character of a Christian, was shown, to the satisfaction of the judge, to have been an impostor, by the luxuriant and frizzled appearance of his hair.*

The same simplicity and plainness reigned throughout the domestic establishments of the Christians. Most of the primitive disciples, indeed, were in circumstances that offered no temptations to indulge in splendour or variety of ornamental furniture. inventory of goods embraced only a few simple articles of use, which their personal and family wants required; and it may be supposed, therefore, that there was nothing remarkable in the absence from their houses, of all traces of pomp and elegance, which they neither possessed the means, nor entertained the hope of acquiring. But even those of their number who were persons of rank and opulence, amply provided with resources to gratify a taste for ornament, chose to content themselves with such things as were recommended by their utility rather than their elegance, and calculated to answer the purposes of necessity and comfort, rather than to gratify the lust of the eye and the pride of life. Seats and cabinets, finished with the costly veneering of tortoise-shell, and couches ornamented with the rich embroideries of Babylon,-vessels of gold and silver, the numberless statues and other graceful accompaniments, of all sizes and forms, which adorned the chambers, the porticoes, and gardens of the rich, and indicated the epicurean taste that distinguished the age, disappeared from the houses of the Christians as inconsistent with a humble and mortified life; and however refined and exquisite the taste which, through education, and the habits of society, any of them had acquired, they learned to

^{*} Fleury. Mœurs des Chretiens.

subject it to the higher principle of denying themselves to every thing that tended too much to captivate the senses, and increase their love to a world, the fashion whereof they thought was soon to pass away. This indiscriminate rejection of the elegancies of life has frequently exposed the memory of the primitive Christians to the sneer of the infidel, and the unmeasured indignation of the enthusiastic admirer of the arts; and, perhaps, in some instances, there may be a foundation for the charge, that they manifested an uncalled-for severity in their too great and unqualified contempt of pleasures, which become sinful only when indulged to a criminal excess.* But to a people on whose minds the doctrines of Christianity had burst with all the force and vividness of a new and important discovery, and among whom the impression almost universally prevailed, that the years of the world were about to close, it was natural to regard with jealousy, and treat with neglect, all the forms of earthly pomp and beauty, that tended to supplant their desires for the objects and glories of that better world on which their hearts were fixed. Although the indifference and superiority to the world which Christianity requires, lies solely in the state and affections of the mind, and this spiritual habit may be cultivated in the most opposite circumstances of affluence or poverty, it was natural that the Christians, in the first ardour of their faith and hope, should overlook this distinction, and consider that their safety consisted in the complete abandonment of luxuries and pleasures, the thought of which was so ready to come in competition with concern for their souls.

Besides, had they been ever so strongly inclined to indulge in a taste for the artificial elegancies of life, they could not have decorated their houses with any of the articles of ornamental furniture then most in repute, without doing violence to all the principles and

Gibbon's Decline and Fall, chap. xv. Hope's Architecture.

feelings most sacred and dear to the Christian mind. Not a work of art was to be found adorning the halls of the rich, nor a utensil adapted to the purposes of domestic life in use among the common people, but bore some memorial of the objects and fables of idolatry. The modern ornaments attached to the handles of cabinets, or the feet of tables, in the shape of the heads and claws of animals, were invariably supplied by images of the gods, wrought in bronze, ivory, and silver. The drinking cups, whether of earthenware or of the more precious metals, were inscribed with the customary form of libation, or with sentiments in praise of the gifts of Ceres and Bacchus. Their rings and seals bore the miniature figures of the familiar household gods, which they carried about with them every where, and to which they prayed as often as circumstances required. And the walls of their chambers were painted with all sorts of figures of men, women, and animals, celebrated in the history, or consecrated to the rites of the popular superstition.* No appearances of beauty, or skill the most exquisite, could reconcile the Christians to works of art, which were thus invariably finished in a style the most offensive to their moral and religious feelings; and, therefore, discarding them with holy abhorrence, they admitted into their houses nothing but what was of the plainest description, and of indispensable use. The Christians of the first age, however, soon found many inconveniences arising from the adoption of such a rule. They could not change one place of residence for another, as they had frequently occasion to do, without being again surrounded with the images of idolatry; and to avoid this, they fell on the expedient which afterwards came to prevail universally in Christian society, of supplanting such heathen objects by similar ones more suited to their principles and feel-Thus, in painting their walls, or carving orna-

^{*} Sir William Gell's Topography of Modern Rome.

ments on their furniture, while they adhered to the general style of decoration which then prevailed, by covering them with groups of men and animals, they were always careful to represent them in such a form, and with such secret marks, as were signs to a Christian eye of their being symbolical of the history or subjects of the Gospel. The emblem of a vine, with figures sporting among the branches, and the various processes connected with the turning of the grapes into wine, which, among the heathen, alluded to the festival of Bacchus, were made by the Christians an allegorical picture, to denote the duties and labours of the vineyard of Christ. Branches of palms, which the heathen regarded as emblems of victory, the Christians adopted to mark the triumphs of the Cross. On their drinking cups, the figure of a shepherd carrying a lamb on his shoulders, represented the Saviour graciously supporting poor and feeble sinners; the dove of Venus became the emblem of the Holy Ghost; the stag of Diana, the symbol of a believer's soul panting after the living waters of salvation; an anchor stood for Christian hope, and a lyre for Christian joy. Thus did the Christian seek to pacify the adherents of the old superstition, by retaining almost all of their familiar pictures and family ornaments, and by fitting up their houses in a style apparently the same as that of their heathen neighbours, but actually associated in the minds of the owners with ideas purely and exclusively Christian. It was a measure of policy, if not of Christian wisdom; and any one, who, by an effort of imagination, places himself in a state of society, where every thing to be met with in daily life was bound up with heathenism, will understand the unspeakable relief imparted to the Christian mind, in being enabled, by such a device, to make the abhorred objects of idolatry the means of reminding it of what was most interesting and glorious in the faith of the Gospel.

The tables of the primitive Christians were distinguished by the greatest frugality and temperance. Their grand principle was to eat and drink in order to satisfy the cravings of nature, and invigorate their bodies for a renewal of their necessary labours; and while, on the one hand, they knew nothing of the austere and painful abstinence, which after-ages of ignorance and superstition came to practise and extol as highly meritorious, they were equally careful, on the other hand, to check the indulgence of a nice and fastidious taste in the gratification of the palate. There was nothing, indeed, which they seem to have been more solicitous to avoid than any imitation of the excessive luxury and epicurean habits of their contemporaries; and justly accounting all excess, whether in eating or in drinking, as incompatible with the maintenance of purity, and attention to spiritual duties, they inflexibly adhered to the rule of abstaining from every thing that tended to inflame the passions, or to engender any hankering after the pleasures of sense. On no species of food did they lay an interdict, except on things strangled, and on blood, according to the counsel of the apostles, which, for many ages, continued in force among the Christians,—and such high seasoned viands as were heating to the frame. Those of the East, indeed, who, living in a warmer climate, were always distinguished by their habits of austerity and abstinence beyond Christians in other places, preferred the flesh of fish or fowl to the grosser and more succulent flesh of quadrupeds. Many of them even lived wholly on a diet consisting of preparations of milk, or of vegetables, or such light fruit as figs and dates. Wine was freely admitted to the tables of the primitive Christians-their notions of propriety, however, forbidding the use of it to women and young people. But even by the other sex it was drank sparingly; and though chiefly the weak wine of the country, was always, according to the practice of the ancients,

diluted with water. To have continued long indulging in such a luxury, or to have been discovered smelling the flavour of the wine-cup,-to have made sumptuous preparations for the table,—to have betrayed much anxiety about the cookery, or produced a great variety of viands and spicery at their entertainments, would, in those early days of Christianity, have brought discredit, if not ruin, on the religious character of the individual. And yet there were no austerities then in vogue among the Christians. Looking upon all the creatures of God as good for food, they deemed themselves at perfect liberty to make use of them as suited their convenience and their taste, at such times, and in such a measure, as temper, constitution, or age, required; and they never dreamt of imposing any limits to the enjoyment of the comforts of life, beyond what reason and religion prescribed. But justly accounting an ill regulated and luxurious appetite as the source of innumerable evils, and placing their highest ambition and pleasure in the attainment of spiritual excellence, they practised the greatest abstemiousness, confining themselves to the plainest and simplest fare, -in many instances taking only one meal, in none more than two a-day, and then never carrying their indulgence in the pleasures of the table farther than that temperate use of them which was necessary to repair the bodily vigour, and which left the mind free and ready, as occasion offered, to engage in prayer or other exercises of religion. The object they proposed to themselves by the practice of such singular moderation, was that of mortifying the senses, and enabling them to wield with a firmer hand the reins of discipline over the motions and appetites of their corrupt nature; and that they entertained not the most distant idea of making a vain and Pharisaic parade of their abstinence, or were accustomed to regard it in no other light than as simply a means of promoting the great end of their moral and religious improvement, is evident from the

following, out of innumerable anecdotes, by which we might illustrate this branch of their customs. Among the martyrs that fell during the violent persecution of the Christians at Lyons, was a young man of the name of Alcibiades, distinguished for the exalted piety of his character, and who had for years accustomed himself to a small and sordid diet. When thrown into the dungeons, he continued the same habits of living, which, though long custom had rendered them easy to himself, gave offence, it seems, to several of his fellow-prisoners, who found it impossible to conform to his standard of abstinence. At length one of the confessors, undertaking seriously to remonstrate with him on the impropriety of refusing to enjoy the gifts of a bountiful Providence, and thereby creating jealousy in the minds of others, Alcibiades listened in a Christian spirit to the friendly admonition, and from that moment, laving aside all singularity, indiscriminately partook of whatever was provided for himself and his brethren in distress. Thus admirably did the primitive Christians observe the golden mean, by avoiding equally the extremes of sordid penury and luxurious gratification of the senses. Their frugal diet acquired a relish from their previous labours; and, while they never denied themselves to any of the good things of life, as far as was consistent with the ends of sobriety and religion, they considered it their duty always to keep within the bounds of that "temperance which is a fruit of the Spirit."

The manner in which they conducted their repasts was itself an effectual preservative of temperance, while, at the same time, it was eminently characteristic of the piety and spirituality of the primitive age.—When dinner had been served, and the family had taken their seats at the table, the master of the household, with a grave and solemn voice, and in a prayer of considerable length, acknowledged their dependence on the care of their common Father, expressed their

gratitude for the past tokens of his bounty, and invoked him to bless, for their health and comfort, the provisions of which they were about to partake. During the progress of the meal, some member of the family, in houses of the lower class, or some hired reader, in those of the richer orders, entertained the company with select portions of the Scriptures; * for so strong and insatiable was their appetite for spiritual food, that they could not rest satisfied and happy without providing suitable refreshment for the soul, at the same time that they were enjoying the comforts of the body. The viands being removed, the family circle was drawn more closely together, -for now were unfolded, and put into the hands of all, the precious scrolls in which, in those days, the Scriptures were written. Previous to this, however, each was expected to put himself in an attitude of becoming reverence; the hands were carefully washed, that not a stain might fall on the Sacred Volume; and, while the men remained with their heads bare, the women covered themselves with a veil, as a token of respect for the Book of God. The head of the family then read aloud a few passages, both from the Old and the New Testament, accompanying them with some plain and simple admonitions of his own, or recalling to the memory of his audience the public exhortations which, on the preceding Sabbath, had been founded on them in the church; or he taught the younger branches of the house to repeat after him the beautiful prayer which was dictated by the lips of the Saviour; and told them, in simple phrase, of the love which God bears to the young, and of the blessedness of remembering their Creator in the days of their youth. These readings and exhortations were always short, and diversified, at intervals, by sacred

^{*} It was customary among the better classes of the ancient pagans to provide readers during their entertainments: the classical reader will remember many instances of this. We may mention only that of Juvenal, who, inviting a friend to sup with him, promises to entertain him with Homer and Virgil.

music,-of which the primitive Christians were passionately fond. Sometimes one, distinguished by taste and talents for spiritual songs, sung some favourite piece of sacred melody; at other times, the shrill voices of the women and the children were blended in full chorus with the deeper tones of the men,-till, as the hour set apart for refreshment drew towards a close, the venerable parent, whose look and attitude called for momentary silence, gave thanks to the Giver of all good for the enjoyment of their natural and spiritual comforts, and prayed that his presence and his blessing might be with them during the succeeding period of labour and duty. Thus, among the primitive Christians, their ordinary refreshments were sanctified with the Word of God and with prayer; and thus were the words of eternal truth interwoven, in the most agreeable and captivating manner, with the habits and the pleasures of every-day life. Instead of consuming their leisure hours in vacant idleness, or deriving their chief amusement from boisterous merriment, the recital of tales of superstition, or the chanting the profane songs of the heathen, * they passed their hours of repose in rational and enlivening pursuits, found pleasure in enlarging their religious knowledge, and entertainment in songs that were dedicated to the praise of God. These formed their pastime in private, and their favourite recreations at their family and friendly meet-With their minds full of the inspiring influence of these, they returned with fresh ardour to their scenes of toil; and, to gratify their taste by a renewal of the same vocal entertainment, they longed for release from labour, far more than to appease their appetite with the provisions of the table. So far were these sacred occupations from being regarded as mere matters of routine by the primitive Christians,—so much were the sentiments and the melody of the sacred songs

[•] Very few of the songs of the heathen, even when they did not relate to the popular religion, were fit for the ears of a Christian.—Lord Hailes' Inquiry, p. 234.

engraven on their memories and dear to their hearts, that after they had left the family group and repaired to their respective employments, they were wont to cheer themselves in private, amid the various processes of labour, with repeating the songs of Zion. Young women sitting at their distaff, and matrons going about the duties of their household, were constantly humming some spiritual airs.* And Jerome relates of the place where he lived, that one could not go into the field without hearing the ploughman at his hallelujahs, the mower at his hymns, and the vine-dresser singing the Psalms of David.

But it was not merely at noon, and in time of their meals, that the primitive Christians read the Word of God and sang praises to his name. At an early hour in the morning the family was assembled, when a portion of Scripture was read from the Old Testament, which was followed by a hymn and a prayer, in which thanks were offered up to the Almighty for preserving them during the silent watches of the night, and for his goodness in permitting them to meet in health of body and soundness of mind; and, at the same time, his grace was implored to defend them amid the dangers and temptations of the day,-to make them faithful to every duty, and enable them, in all respects, to walk worthy of their Christian vocation. During the day, they had, like the Jews, stated seasons, at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, corresponding respectively to nine, twelve, and three o'clock, according to our computation, when those who had command of their time, were wont to retire for a little to engage in the exercises of devotion. In the evening, before retiring to rest, the family again assembled, when the same form of worship was observed as in the morning, with this difference, that the service was considerably protracted beyond the period which could be conveniently allotted to it in the commencement of the day.

^{*} Lives of the Fathers.

Besides all these frequent observances, they were in the habit of rising at midnight to engage in prayer and the singing of psalms,—a practice of venerable antiquity, and which, as Dr Cave justly supposes, "took its origin from the first times of persecution, when, not daring to meet together in the day, they were forced to keep their religious assemblies in the night."*

While the Christians, in their family capacity, observed these periodical seasons of devotion, they laid hold of many opportunities, both stated and occasional, of praying in private. In addition to the secret supplications which every morning and evening they addressed to the throne of grace, they were accustomed, on every proper and convenient occasion, to begin and terminate all their actions with prayer,—either audible or silent, according to circumstances. receiving any personal or domestic token of the divine goodness, when engaged in any important undertaking, such as sowing their seed, or reaping their harvest laying the foundation of a house, or taking possession of it-placing a web in the loom, or putting on a new suit of clothes—entering on a journey, or going into a bath—forming a new relation, or parting with a friend -mingling with company-at the beginning or closing of a letter-they indulged in the aspirations of prayer; and so much did they familiarize themselves with its spirit and its sentiments, that they seemed to have cultivated the habit of constant mental intercourse with their heavenly Father. Prayer, indeed, was the grand element that pervaded the life of the primitive Christians; for that spiritual exercise, being not so much a separate and formal act, as a habit and frame of mind, and consisting of all the various elements of praise and thankfulness, confidence and hope, obedience and love, so these principles of a new nature, being established in their minds, and diffusing a

^{*} Cave's Primitive Christianity.—This practice might have arisen also from a peculiar notion of theirs, that the end of the world was to come literally as a thief in the night.

FASTS. 43

sanctified influence over the whole tenor of their walk and conversation, gave vigour to their faith, stability to their virtue, and fed, like a perpetual spring, all the streams of Christian activity and excellence, for

which they were so remarkable.

But not content with such stated and occasional opportunities as we have now described, the zeal of the primitive Christians prompted them to set apart, from time to time, special and extraordinary seasons, when, retiring from the world and their ordinary avocations, they gave themselves up to earnest and protracted prayer, with a view of establishing on their minds a livelier sense of spiritual things, and preparing themselves to return, with renovated faith and diligence, to the duties, temptations, and trials of life. And as, on all such occasions, they felt themselves under the painful necessity of expressing their humility and sorrow on account of sin, they were accustomed to make them days of fasting as well as of devotion, -not only to indicate, by that act of self-denial, that they were in a state of affliction, but to fit them for better and more uninterrupted fellowship with God, and meditation on heavenly things. These fasts being entirely private and voluntary, were more or less frequent, and of greater or less duration and austerity, according to the temper, habit, or outward circumstances of the individual who appointed them. Sometimes they were observed only on the anniversary of a birth-day; by some they were practised at the beginning of every quarter; while others, again, found it expedient to renew them as often as once a-month, or even once In observing these fasts, the practice of the great majority was to abridge some of their daily comforts only, without subjecting themselves to the pain and inconvenience of total abstinence. Some refrained only from the use of flesh and wine; some contented themselves with a light diet of vegetables or fruit. The Christians in colder latitudes often limited their want

of food to a certain number of hours, while those in warmer climates continued their fasting to the close of But whether the duration of their fasts was longer or shorter, and whether they maintained an entire or merely a partial abstinence from food, they considered it a sacred duty inflexibly to adhere to the time and the manner they had resolved on at the commencement. Thus, for example, Fructuosus, an eminent servant of Christ in Spain, being, along with two deacons of his church, apprehended on a Sabbath, because they refused to sacrifice to the gods, lay in prison for several days before they were brought to trial; and on the fourth day, he, together with his companions in distress, agreed to fast. Early in the morning, after they had resolved on this religious exercise, they were summoned to the presence of the magistrate, and as nothing would shake their determination not to sacrifice, they were forthwith condemned to be burnt alive. While the martyrs were on their way to the amphitheatre, the multitude were loud and universal in their expressions of sympathy, especially with Fructuosus, whose conciliatory manners and benevolent character had won him golden opinions, not only with the Christian, but even the pagan inhabitants of Tarracona, of which he was bishop; and while some of the crowd kindly offered him to drink from a cup of wine, mixed with spices, he declined, saying, "My fast is not yet ended,"-for it still wanted two hours of the entire day.

With the knowledge of these extraordinary means which the primitive Christians adopted for keeping the sacred flame of piety and devotion burning in their hearts, and animating every part of their every-day life, we need not wonder that they were such bright exemplars of every Christian excellence and virtue. They "prayed without ceasing," and as materials of prayer, they had the "Word of God dwelling in them richly and abounding." Indeed, nothing in their his-

tory is more worthy of admiration, than the extensive and accurate knowledge they possessed of the Scriptures. At a time when the copies of the sacred volume were all in manuscript, and very scarce, being so dear as to be beyond the reach of many to purchase, and when multitudes of those who had been converted to Christianity were unacquainted with the first elements of reading, the great majority of them were conversant with the phraseology and the matter of the Word of life, to a degree that may well put Christians of later days to shame. Those of the men who could read, never went abroad without carrying a Bible in their pockets-while the women wore it hanging about their necks,* and, by frequently refreshing their memories by private perusal, and drawing little groups of anxious listeners around them, they acquired so familiar an acquaintance with the lively oracles, that there were few who could not repeat those passages that contained any thing remarkable respecting the doctrines of their faith, or the precepts of their duty. Nay, there were many who had made the rare and enviable attainment of being able to say the entire Scriptures by heart. One person is mentioned among the martyrs in Palestine, so well instructed in the sacred writings, that, when occasion offered, he could, from memory, repeat passages in any part of the Scripture as exactly as if he had unfolded the book and read them; a second, being unacquainted with letters, used to invite friends and Christian strangers to his house to read to him, by which means he acquired an extensive knowledge of the sacred oracles; and another may be mentioned, of whom the description is so extraordinary, that we shall give it in the words of the historian, Eusebius, who knew him: - " Whenever he willed, he brought forth, as from a repository of science, and rehearsed either the law of Moses, or

^{*} Some people were found buried with their copy of the Scriptures fastened to their bosoms.

the prophets, or the historical, evangelical, and apostolical parts of Scripture. Indeed, I was struck with admiration when I first beheld him standing amidst a considerable multitude, and reciting certain portions of holy writ. As long as I could only hear his voice, I supposed that he was reading; but when I came close up to him, I discovered that, employing only the eyes of his mind, he uttered the divine oracles

like some prophet."* These examples of extraordinary knowledge of the Scriptures are quoted as singular only for the natural defects and disadvantages under which the acquisition was made; for the same ardour and indefatigable zeal to study the oracles of divine truth animated all classes of the followers of Christ in early times, whether they were educated or not. The Bible was the book which they prized above all other learning, and which they never wearied in reading, or hearing read; philosophers abandoning the language and speculations of the schools as only "darkness visible," gave their days and nights to inquire after the wisdom from above; men of taste and literature found Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero, jejune, insipid, and unedifying, in comparison of the Psalms of David, and the Epistles of Paul; and the whole society of Christians laboured and delighted in exploring the mine of Scripture-where they found that the deeper they dug, the richer was the ore, and the higher the reward. Every day it was the practice for each individual to commit a portion of Scripture to memory, and for the members of a family to repeat it to each other in the evening. So much was this custom regarded as part of the ordinary business of the day, that they had a set time appointed for conning the daily lesson—an hour which, though every individual fixed it as suited his private convenience, was held so precious and sacred, that no secular

^{*} Lord Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. iii.

duties, however urgent, were allowed to infringe upon it; and while some, who had their time at their own disposal, laid their memories under larger contributions, and never relaxed their efforts, till they had completed the daily task they had imposed on themselves, others were obliged to content themselves with such shorter passages as they could learn during the intervals of labour, and amid the distractions of other cares. By all classes, however, it was considered so great an advantage—so desirable an attainment to have the memory richly stored with the records of salvation, that while in the lapse of time many ancient practices became obsolete, and others more suited to the taste of succeeding ages were adopted into the Church, this excellent custom still maintained its place among the venerable observances inherited from primitive times; and the pious Christians of the first centuries would have regarded it as a sin of omission, for which they had occasion expressly to supplicate pardon in their evening devotions, if they were conscious of having allowed a day to pass, without having added some new pearls from the Scriptures to the sacred treasures their memory had previously amassed.

The same sense which matured Christians themselves entertained of the supreme value and incomparable excellence of the Scriptures, they laboured, as might have been anticipated, to impress on the vounger members of their family. This duty, which, in any circumstances, is generally left to mothers, and which they have peculiar advantages for performing, was, from the state of society and the manifold distractions of primitive times, devolved almost entirely on the maternal care. And there is not among the many interesting traits of Christian character with which the history of the early Christians abounds, one that stands out more frequently in beautiful and prominent relief, than the tender solicitude and the winning arts which they employed to imbue the susceptible minds of the young with the knowledge and the faith of the Scripture. While they were fondled on the knee, and still watched by the careful eyes of their nurse, the first words they were taught to lisp and articulate were the sacred names of God and the Saviour. And the whole range of nursery knowledge and amusement was comprised in narratives and pictures, illustrating episodes in the life of the holy Child, or parables the most simple and interesting in the ministry of Christ. As their minds expanded, they were taught, along with grand doctrines of Scripture, which, according to the approved fashion of those days, were rendered familiar by apposite similitudes from nature, the Proverbs of Solomon, and those passages of the sacred volume which relate particularly to

the economy of life.

Religion, in short, was the grand basis of education, the only subject which, during the first years of life, they allowed their children to be taught; and in order to present it to their minds with the greater attractions, and entwine it with their earliest and purest associations, they adopted the happy expedient of wedding it to the graces of poetry, and rendering it more memorable by the melody of numbers. From the earliest period of Christian antiquity, there were authors who, like Watts in modern times, "condescended to lay aside the scholar, the philosopher, and the wit, to write little poems of devotion, adapted to the wants and capacities of children,"* and these, set to well-known and favourite airs, borrowed from the profaner songs of the heathen, were sung by the Christians at their family concerts, which enlivened their meals, and by which alone the still and peaceful tranquillity of their homes was ever broken. Ere long, their children were taught common, and frequently short-hand writing, in lines taken from the Psalms, or in words of sententious

^{*} Dr Johnson's Life of Watts

brevity, in which the leading doctrines of the Gospel were stated; and at a later period, when the progress of toleration allowed Christian seminaries to be erected, the school-books in use consisted chiefly of passages of the Bible versified, and of the poetical pieces which illustrated or enforced the great subjects of faith and duty. The most celebrated of these were compositions of the two Apollinares, grammarians of high reputation in Syria—the elder of whom, in imitation of Homer, wrote the Antiquities of the Jews in heroic verse, down to the reign of Saul, while the rest of the sacred story he described in such metrical forms as corresponded to the verses of the Greek Tragedians, and the lyrical ballads of Pindar. The department undertaken by his son, was that of reducing the history of the Evangelists and the Epistles of Paul into the form and style of Plato's dialogues; and with so much taste and elegance were both of these works compiled, that on their first appearance they took their place among the most esteemed productions of the age of the Fathers.* Besides these, there was a collection of miscellaneous poems on sacred subjects, and in all sorts of verse, by the famous Gregory Nazianzen, in very extensive circulation. † By means of these, and of many other evangelical books which have long ago become the prey of time, the Christian youth were introduced to the elements of pure and undefiled religion, and their taste for knowledge and the beauties of learning created and formed by works in which salvation was held up as the one thing needful, and no achievements described, no characters lauded, but such as were adorned with the fruits of righteousness. Thus did the pious care of the primitive Christians intermingle religion with all the pursuits and recreations of the young, and never allow them to engage in

^{*} Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. p. 276.—Quarterly Review, 1832.

[†] A book on Science and Natural History, with religious reflections, and in a religious spirit, also came from the pen of the younger Apollinaris.

the study of science, or to plunge into the business of the world, until they had been first taught to view every thing in the spirit, and by the principles of the Word of God.

There was no feature of their private manners more remarkable, than the frequency with which they made use of the sign of the cross. With minds filled as theirs were, with lively faith in the grand doctrine of redemption, and making it, as they did almost every moment, the subject of their meditations, and the theme of their gratitude, it is not wonderful, that they should have devised some concise mode of recalling it to their memories, or of expressing to each other by some mutual token, the principles and hopes they held Accordingly, the sign of the cross in common. naturally suggested itself as an appropriate emblem, and so early was its introduction among the daily observances of the Christians, that the most ancient of the Fathers, whose writings have descended to our times, speak of it as in their days a venerable practice, which, though it would be in vain to seek any Scriptural authority for its use, tradition had authorised, custom had confirmed, and faith observed.* Although, however, we have no authentic account of its introduction, we can guess at its origin. It was a beautiful custom of those who lived while the ministry of Christ was recent, and who were suddenly brought from the depths of despair at his death, to indescribable joy at his resurrection, to break off in the middle of conversation, and salute one another with the words, "Christ is risen." The practice was peculiar to the contemporaries of the Saviour; and it is not improbable, that when time, by removing them farther from that spirit-stirring event, had brought the interesting custom into disuse, his followers, in the next age, sought to substitute in its place that, which in every variety of time and circumstance, forms the chief subject of

^{*} Tertullian.

interest in the history and religion of Jesus, and on which, as the grand foundation, the whole superstructure of Christian doctrine rests. Accordingly. the cross was used by the primitive Christians as an epitome of all that is most interesting and important in their faith; and its sign, where the word could not be conveniently nor safely uttered, represented their reliance on that event which is at once the most ignominious and the most glorious part of Christianity. It was used by them at all times, and to consecrate the most common actions of life—when rising out of bed, or retiring to rest—when sitting at table, lighting a lamp, or dressing themselves—on every occasion, as they wished the influence of religion to pervade the whole course of their life, they made the sign of the cross the visible emblem of their faith. * The mode in which this was done was various. The most common was by drawing the hand rapidly across the forehead, or by merely tracing the sign in air; in some cases, it was worn close to the bosom, in gold, silver, or bronze medals, suspended by a concealed chain from the neck; † in others, it was engraven on the arms or some other part of the body by a coloured drawing, made by pricking the skin with a needle. and borne as a perpetual memorial of the love of Christ. ‡ In times of persecution, it served as the watchword of the Christian party. Hastily described by the finger, it was the secret but well-known signal by which Christians recognised each other in the presence of their heathen enemies; by which the persecuted sought an asylum, or strangers threw themselves on the hospitality of their brethren; and nothing appeared to the pagan observer more strange and inexplicable, than the ready and open-hearted manner in which, by this concerted means, foreign Christians

^{*} Tertullian, Mosheim de Reb. Christ., p. 671; Fleury, Histoire Eccles., tom. ii. p. 116.

[†] Hope.

^{\$} Whitby and Burder on Gal. vi. 17.

were received by those whom they had never previously seen or heard of,-were welcomed into their homes, and entertained with the kindness usually bestowed only on relations and friends. * Moreover, to the sacred form of the cross were ascribed peculiar powers of protecting from evil; and hence it was frequently resorted to as a secret talisman, to disarm the vengeance of a frowning magistrate, or counteract the odious presence and example of an offerer of sacrifice. It was the only outward means of defending themselves, which the martyrs were wont to employ, when summoned to the Roman tribunals on account of their faith. It was by signing himself with the cross, that Origen, when compelled to stand at the threshold of the temple of Serapis, and give palm-branches, as the Egyptian priests were in the habit of doing, to them that went to perform the sacred rites of the idol, fortified his courage, and stood uncontaminated amid the concourse of profane idolaters. † But, perhaps, the most remarkable instance on record of the use of this sign by the primitive Christians, and of the sense they entertained of its potent virtues, occurs in the reign of Diocletian, when that timorous and superstitious prince, in his anxiety to ascertain the events of his Eastern campaign, slew a number of victims, that, from their livers, the augurs might prognosticate the fortunes of the war. During the course of the sacrifice, some Christian officers, who were officially present, put the immortal sign on their foreheads, and forthwith, as the historian relates, the rites were disturbed. The priests, ignorant of the cause, searched in vain for the usual marks on the entrails of the beasts. Once and again the sacrifice was repeated with a similar result, when, at length, the chief of the soothsavers observing a Christian signing himself with the cross, exclaimed, "It is the presence of profane persons that

^{*} Bingham.

[†] Lives of the Fathers, vol. i., p. 219.

has interrupted the rites." * Thus common was the use, and thus high the reputed efficacy of this sign among the primitive Christians. But it was not in the outward form, but solely in the divine qualities of Him whose name and merits it symbolized, that the believers of the first ages conceived its charm and its virtues to reside. † It was used by them "merely as a mode of expressing, by means perceptible to the senses, the purely Christian idea, that all the actions of Christians, as well as the whole course of their life, must be sanctified by faith in the crucified Redeemer, and by dependence upon him, and that this faith is the most powerful means of conquering all evil, and preserving oneself against it. It was not till after times, that men began to confound the idea and the token which represented it, and that they attributed the effects of faith in the crucified Redeemer to the outward signs, to which they ascribed a supernatural and preservative power." #

Having thus far surveyed that branch of the manners of the primitive Christians that relates more particularly to their domestic habits, it now only remains to show how they employed those little intervals of time which were not occupied either in labour or in the duties of religion, and which, especially at the close of the day, it has been the general custom of all ages to dedicate to amusements and the pleasures of social intercourse. It was undoubtedly no part of the creed of enlightened Christians in those days, any more than it is in the present, that innocent mirth and recreations must be banished from the precincts of a good man's dwelling, or that, as the followers of Christ, they were called upon to abstract themselves from the ordinary refinements and civilities of life. And accordingly, knowing that the bow that is seldom

^{*} Hailes' Lactantius.

[†] The primitive Christians commonly painted the figure of Christ dying on the cross on the outside of their Bibles, and this was the only ornament with which they were ever gilt.

‡ Neander.

or never unstrung soon loses its native elasticity and vigour, they were as ready as other men to relax themselves with such pastimes as were really recreations, and calculated to refresh and invigorate the jaded powers of body and of mind. But there were some of the amusements fashionable in the private circles of the day, in which neither their principles nor their habits would allow them to join, -such as dice, and other sedentary plays of a similar kind, which they discouraged, both as being games of hazard, and as too apt, from the general devotion to them, to foster habits of idleness and profligacy. There was a pastime of a different character, of which their contemporaries throughout the Roman empire were passionate lovers, and which consisted in decorating the fronts of their houses with triumphal branches, so as to form pleasure bowers, in which they gave themselves to all sorts of diversion and merriment. The refusal of the Christians to participate in this elegant amusement, arose from no insensibility to the beautiful productions of nature, which constituted the grand attraction of such a scene, but from its being connected with idolatrous festivities. We who live at a period when the tone of public sentiment is all in favour of the principles and practice of Christianity, view such parts of their character from a point of observation where we can scarcely sympathize with them. Nor can we readily enter into the feelings of those who moved in a state of society where every element of nature was consecrated to the service of paganism, and the simplest and most innocent amusements could not be enjoyed without offence to all that is pure and holy. When they entered into society, of which they were exceedingly fond, and mingled either with their brethren, or such of their heathen neighbours as admitted their acquaintance, the chief pleasure they sought was the enjoyment of rational conversation, and of that calm, silent,

playful mirth, which gently exhibarates the spirits. But loud bursts of laughter, and all kinds of levity and passionate excitement—ludicrous stories and acts of buffoonery—tales or jests bordering on indecency, or that ran into silly and useless badinage, found no quarter in the society of Christians. And as such frivolous and licentious talk was the staple discourse in which the light-minded Epicurean heathens around them commonly indulged, hence the habit, which became general among the Christians, of sitting much in silence. Over their whole demeanour, indeed, there presided a staid and serious air, induced as well from the constant necessity under which they felt themselves of guarding against the extremely loose and dissolute style of manners that prevailed around them, as from the solemn impressions they had received from Christianity. But it would be wrong to suppose that they were without enjoyment, or that they led a gloomy and melancholy life. At a time when their contemporaries lived almost wholly out of doors, engrossed with an incessant round of riot and sensual indulgence —in the baths, the porticoes of the temples, and other pleasure-grounds, they first created, and were the first to feel all the charities that are included in the endearing name of home, and that have made Christians in every age resort to it, as the scene of the best and purest enjoyments of life. If they were strangers to violent and high-wrought excitement, they were also exempt from those poignant disappointments and cares that often embitter the retirement of the votaries of ambition and pleasure. Keeping their affections loose and detached from the objects and the possessions of a transitory world, they were not liable to be greatly annoyed by its losses and its trials; and though the simple and sober course of their every-day life was seldom or never enlivened with the festivities and amusements by which time is killed, they had a calm, tranquil, perennial flow of comforts and joys peculiar

to themselves, and with which strangers could not intermeddle; so that to them were applicable the lines of the poet,—

"With us no melancholy void,
No moment lingers unemployed
Or unenjoyed below;
Our weariness of life is gone,
Who live to serve our God alone,
And only Jesus know."

CHAPTER II.

PRIVATE MANNERS CONTINUED.

PARTICULAR EMPLOYMENTS ABJURED—IDOL-MAKING—ASTROLOGY AND MAGIC—ACTORS—CASE OF A TEACHER OF ACTING—STORY OF A PERSON BEING SEIZED WITH MORTAL SICKNESS IN THE THEATRE—GLADIATORS—STORY OF ALYPIUS—CIVIL AND MILITARY OFFICES—STORY OF MARCELLUS—PROVISION FOR SUCH AS WERE OBLIGED TO ABANDON THEIR TRADE—ESPOUSALS—MARRIAGE.

THE ranks of Christians, during the first ages, were almost wholly filled with persons in the lower grades of life, who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow; and, accordingly, we find fishermen, shoemakers, masons, tentmakers, smiths, carpenters, mechanics of every name and every degree, among the early followers of Jesus. A large proportion of these were born and bred originally in circumstances that obliged them to engage in trade, as a means of procuring a livelihood for themselves and families, and they, of course, repaired to their workshops, and continued all the habits of daily labour, as well after as before their conversion to Christianity. But, besides those Christians who were workmen by birth and necessity, there were numbers also in primitive times of the higher and richer classes, who, on becoming disciples of Christ, voluntarily parted with their property, either from fear of the temptations incident to an idle life, or from a wish to bestow their money on charitable purposes, and betaking themselves to some manual occupation, lived in all respects as ordinary artisans. In the selection of those trades, each, of course, consulted his own taste, or was influenced by the consideration of having a reasonable prospect of regular and continued employment. But, along with the temporal benefits of the business, they invariably took into their estimate also the advantages it afforded for the advancement of their moral and spiritual interests; and no pursuit, however lucrative, no situation, however respectable, had any temptation in the eyes of a primitive Christian, that either familiarised him with scenes inconsistent with purity and virtue, or could not be prosecuted without a compromise of principles he accounted dearer and more precious than the wealth of worlds.

Although the religion of Jesus sheds a sanctifying influence over every scene and circumstance in life, and there is no situation, where the seeds of piety may not be sown, or the fruits of holiness spring forth and ripen to maturity, yet, in every state of society, there are some occupations which place more difficulties and temptations in the way of cultivating the virtues and practising the duties of religion than others. so far was the age of primitive Christianity from being an exception, that there was then a great variety of trades and ways of living which the Christians not only avoided, from a persuasion that the daily routine of such occupations would interfere with the enjoyment of their faith, but against which they entered their unanimous protest, as totally inconsistent with its principles. Their grand rule being to make every pursuit subservient to religion, and to infuse its spirit into all the habits of every-day life, they were accustomed to make choice of such employments only as were favourable to retirement and reflection. Into all professions, the duties of which required religion to be banished, or allowed it to be attended to but rarely and as a secondary concern, they not only declined,

and would have endured the greatest privations rather than have been prevailed on to enter; but they imposed it as an indispensable condition on all new converts to Christianity, who had been connected with such a way of life, to relinquish their old pursuits on being admitted to the Christian society. And as no picture of their private manners can be considered complete, that does not embrace a view of their opinions in regard to contemporary habits, we commence this chapter with an enumeration of those departments in the division of ancient labour, which the primitive

Christians abjured and condemned.

In the foremost rank of these we place the manufacture of idols. That employment, as might be expected, was a most lucrative one, and occupied a far greater number of workmen than any other business. For not only were the temples, the highways, and other public places of all sorts filled with statues of the gods, but every family required, as an indispensable part of their furniture, a suitable equipment of images-some tall as the life, to grace their halls and gardens-some of a portable size, as were the figures of the household gods, and others enclosed in cameo, on their rings, which they carried about with them and worshipped, whenever they found occasion for the aid or protection of their patron deities. The making of these gave employment to carpenters, masons, jewellers, silversmiths, sculptors, and painters, besides many others. At all times these found a ready sale in the market; and at certain seasons, when people were changing their houses, or about to commence a household establishment, few things were in greater demand than miniature shrines and trinket representations of the objects of popular worship.

In the fabrication and the sale of these idol images, multitudes of the Christians, at the period of their embracing the religion of Jesus, were engaged. Some of them were bound to the trade by gratitude for the

affluent circumstances to which it had raised them, and more from their being unacquainted with the mysteries of any other craft, by which themselves and their families could obtain a livelihood. But no sooner were they brought to perceive the sin of "changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man," than, losing sight of all inferior interests, in their anxiety to obey the truth, they threw down the implements of their art, determined never more to pollute them in the service of idolatry. They argued, that they could not, without the grossest inconsistency, lift up to God the hands which had been recently employed in helping the cause of his enemy, nor continue even the sale of idols to those who wanted them, without becoming partakers of other men's sins. Every feeling of their new nature rose in arms against a traffic so dishonourable to God, and so degrading to man, insomuch that the Christians of the first age unanimously renounced all connection with the unholy trade; and there was not to be found a solitary individual among them, who could have been tempted by the largest bribes, or overawed by the severest menaces, to carve a log, or cast a mould for an With some Christians, however, in the succeeding age, the love of money prevailed over principle and piety; and in the time of Tertullian, there were many who, while they professed to hold image-worship in abhorrence, carried on the business of making and selling idols, justifying themselves on the ground that they were simply trading as artists, and dealing in works of art, without considering themselves responsible for the purpose to which their merchandise might be applied. Such a plea the zeal of an earlier and a purer age would have rejected with indignation, and visited the mercenary artisan with its heaviest censures. Degenerate as the times were become, the tone of public feeling among the Christians every where was so strong and decided against any members of their

society engaging in such a traffic, that the business of idol-making may be said to have been, during the three first centuries, not only a disreputable, but a forbidden trade.*

Not less so were astrology, magic, and the whole tribe of similar impostures. To one ignorant of the history of the ancient Greeks and Romans, it will appear almost incredible how many people lived on the credulity of the public, and what an infinite variety of curious arts were then practised, the very names of which are now altogether unknown. Besides the astrologers, who, by gazing at the stars, professed to ascertain the course of events on the earth below, there were magicians, who performed wonderful feats of legerdemain, -soothsayers and fortune-tellers, who, by inspecting the entrails of cattle, watching the flight of birds, or examining the palm of the hands, undertook to reveal to their customers the prosperity or adversity that awaited them, -makers of amulets to hang from the neck, or of fantastic ornaments on the dress, as charms against the influence of enchantment or disease,—dealers in Ephesian letters, and other forms of words, which were thought to possess a mysterious virtue, and an incredible multitude of others, who, in a superstitious age, carried on a lucrative trade, and were not only followed by the rabble, but patronised by the great, and even retained in the service of the State. All these mysteries, then such fruitful sources of imposture and deceit, the Christians viewed as sinful,—as ministering to an unhallowed curiosity,—upholding the cause of superstition, and an impious invasion of the province of God, who has drawn a veil over the secrets of futurity; and though many of them had been initiated into the principles, and engaged in the practice of these black arts, yet no sooner did they perceive their vanity and unlawfulness, than, without regretting the loss of their former gains,

^{*} Bingham, vol. iv., p. 280; Cave's Prim. Christianity, p. 106.

they burned the books that described the mystic rites, and in the study of which they had spent many a guilty hour, and, renouncing the worthless pursuits, made choice of occupations more in harmony with their Christian principles and views. A Christian continuing to follow the trade of a diviner, an astrologer, or a manufacturer of charms, would have been a phenomenon in the first ages,—certain of being

recorded for the astonishment of posterity.*

The profession of an actor was especially proscribed by the community of Christians. From the passionate fondness of the ancients for shows and spectacles of all kinds, the number of those who dedicated their lives to public amusement was infinitely great. the constant demand for their performances, there were few occupations by which larger sums of money were drawn; and, consequently, there was an incessant influx of competitors for the favour and patronage of the public, to swell the ranks of the actors. them performed the part of buffoons, exciting the laughter of the people by their antic tricks and their ludicrous jokes, while others confined themselves to dancing, which in those days was invariably a pantomimic representation of some story of the quarrels or amours of the gods; some acted masquerades,-men and women interchanging characters, and appearing in the dress of the opposite sex, to exhibit the most indecent gestures, and indulge in the most obscene conversation; while others showed feats of agility, either by running, leaping, or racing in chariots. the departments of these public showmen were equally forbidden by the Christians, who condemned them both for the lewdness and profanity which were inseparable from the exhibition, and for their well-known connection with the cause of idolatry; and although some of these occupations may to us, who view them from a

^{*} In later times, it was extremely difficult to keep Christians from wearing amulets. The strong denunciations of the primitive writers show how deeply they were tinctured with superstition.

different point of observation, appear not essentially immoral or unchristian in their nature, yet, patronised as they always were, by some idol deity, and associated as they always were, with scenes of the grossest licentiousness, it is no wonder that the Christians strongly forbade them to all who belonged to their society. Indeed, they could not have done otherwise than discountenance such occupations; for actors, however much they were applauded in the theatres, were regarded, even by virtuous and enlightened heathens, as a degraded and infamous class of men,—so much so, that they were excluded from the honours and privileges which were free and open to all other citizens; and hence the Christians, who professed a higher tone of morals than the best of the heathen, had no alternative but to prohibit all within the pale of the Church from entering on an employment, the members of which were held in such low estimation.

The prohibition was extended to the private teachers of the histrionic art. In early times, the case occurred of a Christian, who had been on the stage himself, engaging to give lessons to boys and young men destined to the profession he had formerly practised. The feelings of his Christian brethren were deeply wounded by his unexpected procedure; and Cyprian, bishop of the Church, within whose bounds this breach of propriety was committed, gave his opinion, that the backslider must either relinquish his intended instructions, or be considered as having fallen from his Christian principles.* The ban was even laid on several civil appointments of high respectability and influence, because the individual holding them was officially called to provide, from time to time, a public exhibition of games and spectacles for the amusement of the populace. Such being the views entertained by the Christians of the disreputable nature of an actor's profession, it is not to be wondered at that

^{*} Cyprian. Epist. vi.

the same feelings were extended to the scene of his performances; and accordingly, from the earliest times of the Church, the theatre was looked upon by the generality of Christians as a place which it was a scandal to their name and character to frequent. The avowed subserviency of the institution to the cause of idolatry,—the improper and disgusting nature of many of the exhibitions,—the vicious and abandoned characters introduced on the stage, and held up in the most captivating colours to the approbation of the audience, —the indecent intermixture of men and women, and the voluptuous scenes which, through a thousand channels, addressed themselves to the senses, and inflamed the passions;—these, not to speak of the tumultuous riot inseparable from the place, -of the idle and disorderly habits it engendered, and of the insatiable taste it created for an incessant round of frivolous and high-wrought pleasure, made the theatre altogether unfit for the presence of those who professed to walk by faith and not by sight,—not to be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, and to make it the grand end and aim of their being, to live to the glory of God, and in the practice of holiness and virtue. In short, they viewed the theatre as a school of immorality and vice, where there was not only much to be seen and heard, grossly offensive to their moral and religious feelings, but into which it was scarcely possible to enter without receiving some contamination; and hence it was not uncommon for new converts to Christianity to discover their change of views to the world by a discontinuance of their attendance on the public spectacles. Notwithstanding this prevailing opinion of its unlawfulness, however, there were some Christians who, under the influence of universal fashion, and from the force, perhaps, of their ancient habits and predilections, allowed themselves, in opposition to their better judgment, to repair to the theatre; and the effects of such stolen visits on

persons of a weak and nervous temperament, were not only to inflict wounds on their minds, which long after annoyed them, and made memory a curse, but were sometimes most alarming and disastrous to their life and health. One woman, who had privately gone to the theatre, was carried home in the wretched state of one possessed by a demon; and when attempts were made to exorcise the spirit, and he was interrogated how he dared to take possession of the soul of a Christian, the answer returned, either by him or the distressed woman, who supposed she was speaking in name of the evil spirit, was, "I was perfectly at liberty to seize her, as she had come within the precincts of my own dominions." Another woman, after retiring from the theatre, was awe-struck by a fearful vision in the night, and, probably in consequence of the agitation into which she was thrown, died a few days afterwards.* These distressing effects, of which many other instances could be adduced from the records of primitive times, evidently arose from the violent conflicts of conscience in minds strongly impressed with the sinfulness of theatrical amusements, and yet destitute of sufficient strength of principle to resist their temptation. But there were many cases, at the same time, of a different description, -of persons who, though witnessing a good confession, yet indulging in the public spectacles without any symptoms of pain and remorse, were, through an increasing fondness for dramatic shows, involved again in the vortex of paganism. When we consider either of the unhappy results now described, we cannot but perceive and admire the Christian wisdom and prudence, that required all who named the name of Christ, to stand aloof from these haunts of folly and sin.

But there were none of the pursuits of their contemporaries, to which the Christians were so inveterately opposed, as to the profession of gladiators,—

^{*} Tertullian, quoted by Bingham, Cave, and Neander.

those men who fought on the sands of the amphitheatre,-who, infamous as they were by character and habit for barbarous and brutal cruelties, sought glory in belabouring one another with all the parade of science, and were neither more nor less than a class of legalised murderers. There can scarcely be a more striking proof of the influence of custom in deadening the feelings of our moral nature, than that nations so highly advanced in civilization and refinement as the ancient Greeks and Romans, should countenance and establish such a savage species of amusement; and vet so passionately fond were they of these exhibitions, that all classes repaired in crowds to the amphitheatre, when a show of gladiators was expected. Business was suspended, and every other pastime forgotten. Men of the first rank and character-orators, senators, and philosophers,-viewed them with the highest interest; and even the hands of the gentler sex were always conspicuous in giving the tokens of praise or disapprobation of the combatants. These sanguinary spectacles it was impossible that the Christians could sanction with their presence. No sooner was Christianity known in the world, than it vindicated the rights of humanity by the condemnation of gladiatorial shows; and during the whole of the three first centuries, we find its adherents maintaining unqualified opposition both to the spectacles themselves and to the professional actors in the bloody scenes. It was the more necessary for the Christians to assume a decided tone in regard to these degrading amusements, that education, and the prevailing style of manners, led some to cherish a hankering after the forbidden indulgence,—by yielding to which the most lamentable effects resulted to the purity and stedfastness of their Christian character. One anecdote of this kind, that has been recorded, is too remarkable to be omitted. Alypius, one of the most intimate friends of Augustine, was in the habit

of expressing more frequently and loudly than most other people, his horrid detestation of gladiatorial combats. An invitation was one day given him by some of his acquaintances to accompany them to the amphitheatre, but he refused to be a spectator of the inhuman sports. Their entreaties were urgent and unremitting that he should go; and they at length drew him to the place of exhibition against his will. They had scarcely taken their seats, when the games commenced. Alypius, horror-struck at finding himself in such a situation, was most anxious to leave the amphitheatre. But finding it impossible to press through the crowd, he shut his eyes, that objects so detestable might not deaden his feelings, and contaminate his mind. "Would to God," says Augustine, who relates the story, "that he had stopped his ears also." For, on hearing a loud cry, he allowed himself to be overcome by curiosity, and opened his eyes to ascertain what occasioned it, flattering himself that he still retained the power of shutting them at pleasure. One of the gladiators had received a severe wound, which was apparent to the whole assembly by the crimson stream that issued from the naked body of the miserable man. Alypius saw it, but instead of instantly withdrawing his eyes from the painful spectacle, he gazed as if he had been rivetted to the spot. From that moment he became an enthusiastic admirer of these brutal contests. His character and habits underwent a complete change; his frame was convulsed with ecstasy when he saw a fresh pair of combatants enter the lists; his shouts, the clapping of his hands, and his whole deportment, arrested the attention of the bystanders, and he retired from the amphitheatre with so violent a passion for gladiatorial shows, that he not only determined next day to return himself, and feast his eyes with the sanguinary game, but used all his influence to inspire others with a similar taste. The case of this man, who not only

professed, but had once given good reason to believe that he felt, the power of Christian principle, affords a melancholy example of the weakness of the best resolutions to overcome the force of strong temptations; and, at the same time, a striking proof of the wisdom of the Christians in discouraging a taste for this favourite, but seductive and criminal amusement of the times.*

Their views respecting the lawfulness of holding civil and military offices were influenced by circumstances somewhat different from those which led them to condemn the pursuits we have just enumerated. † Many were in the ranks, at the time of their conversion to Christianity, who continued in the military profession after a change had taken place in their religious principles; and there is no evidence that, at any one period in the course of the three first centuries, the general body of Christians maintained there was any essential incompatibility between the spirit of the Gospel and the life of a soldier. But in the peculiar circumstances of the world at that time, when idolatry pervaded all the political and social institutions of life, the duties of Christianity were often at variance with the requirements of the State; and in no profession so much as in that of soldiers, who were more immediately under the eye and command of the emperor, were such collisions apt to occur. When mounted guard at the palace or the temples, during the celebration of the public festivals, and in going through the holiday parade, that graced the anniversary of an imperial birth-day, they were often required to

^{*} Tertullian tells us, that more persons were deterred from embracing Christianity by the fear of losing their pleasures, than from the danger with which their lives were threatened.—Neander, p. 64.

[†] Some Christians, in later times, justified themselves in frequenting shows of gladiators, by the plea that it was criminals only who were made to fight. Even that ground is not tenable, as it is a most unchristian thing to derive pleasure and entertainment from the violent death of a criminal; but there is good reason for thinking that the lists of combatants were not made up solely of persons condemned to die. Men were trained for the bloody sport,—slaves were often compelled to engage in it,—Christians were sometimes selected for it.

participate in the ceremonies of the heathen religion; and in all such cases, the Christians were unanimous that they should abandon the service, and surrender the brightest prospects of promotion, rather than be guilty of any breach of fidelity to the Captain of their salvation. Hence proceeded the impressive reply, made by a youth who was ordered to enrol himself-"I am a Christian, and therefore I cannot fight;" and hence was occasioned the still more famous conduct of Marcellus, who, while all his companions were busied in assisting at the sacrifices during a festival in the reign of Gallienus, threw away his vine-branch and his armour, exclaiming, "I will not fight any longer under the banner of your emperor, or serve your idols of wood and stone. If there is no alternative for a soldier, but either to sacrifice to gods and emperors, or resign his commission, I abandon the vinebranch and girdle, and renounce the service for ever." The noble officer forfeited his life by this courageous adherence to his principles, and multitudes of obscurer followers of Jesus shared a similar fate by their resistance, or were deterred from entering the ranks from the dread of being appointed to such idolatrous services. These difficulties, incident to the military profession in the first ages of the Church, gave rise to a much agitated question, whether, supposing no duties to be imposed on a soldier of an antichristian or a sinful nature, it was consistent with the principles of the Gospel to bear arms in any circumstances. Some there were, who, never anticipating the possibility of Christianity and the State being in any other than. hostile relations, imbibed the opinion, that their religion forbade them to enlist in the service of their country; and, in support of this practice, were accustomed to allege that the weapons of their warfare were not carnal but spiritual,—that Christ declared, that all they who fight with the sword shall perish by the sword,—that many passages of Scripture, taken

in their plain and literal acceptation, condemned those grosser passions and that tumultuous strife which are engendered in a camp,—and that they could serve the emperor, and be beneficial to their country more effectually, by praying for their prosperity and deliverance from intestine and foreign enemies, than by wielding the weapons of war. Others, again, while they denied that Scripture contains any express prohibition against the exercise of arms in the public service, defended the lawfulness of accepting military offices by the examples of many pious men in the Old Testament history,—by the conduct of the Baptist towards the soldiers who repaired to his ministry, and whom he exhorted to be content with their wages, without hinting at the necessity of their changing their way of life,—and by the strict discipline of the Roman army, which was favourable to the practice of Christian temperance and virtue. The question was one that arose out of the peculiar circumstances of the times, and it need not surprise us to find, that on a subject of this nature, a variety of discordant opinions were entertained and acted on by men, with whose judgments many elements of feeling and of prudence must have mingled, to prevent them from forming a dispassionate opinion on the general principles of Christianity. To us, who view it from so different a point of observation, - who know that, even amid all the infelicities of a military life, Christian piety and virtue may flourish, and that in every age of the Church, and in none more than the present, there have been men who blended, in happiest union, the firmest courage of the soldier with the deep and ardent devotion of the saint, their scruples may appear unreasonable and groundless. But we must remember, that they were scruples felt only by a few, though some ancient writers, ignorant of their principles, fastened them on the whole body of primitive Christians; and that even in the case of those who

doubted the lawfulness of the military profession, their peculiar views, mistaken and erroneous though they were, and springing, as they did, from a conscientious regard to the authority of the Scriptures as their grand and only rule, entitle their character to our estimation, far above those who enter on the life of a soldier, or undertake the duties of other situations, uninfluenced by any principle but the pliant and accommodating motive of interest.*

For the multitudes of Christians who, either voluntarily, or in compliance with the established views of their brethren, abandoned any of the professions to which we have alluded, some provision was obviously necessary, until they had acquired the knowledge of some other trades by which themselves and their families might obtain a livelihood. And accordingly, it was customary to receive such persons into the number of the poor, and supply their necessary wants from the common funds of the Church, until they were again in circumstances to support themselves. If they were in a remote province, where the brethren were few, and the Christian treasury ill able to bear the burden, a contribution was levied on the benevolence of the neighbouring churches, so that every facility was afforded to the disciples of Jesus in those primitive times, to change a profession, or a mode of living, which their Christian principles would not allow them to continue. And a sentence of excommunication might, with the greatest propriety, be pronounced on all who, in such circumstances, refused to separate themselves from forbidden society.

The same pure and high-toned principles that led them to regulate their habits of living, as well as their choice of a profession, by the rules of Christianity, reigned no less, as might have been expected, over their conduct in the highest and most important

[•] Their ideas respecting the lawfulness of Christians holding a civil office in a heathen State, were influenced by the same views as those which governed them in regard to the military profession.

relation—marriage. It is true that, from the earliest times, there were some who preferred to lead a single life; and that, at the beginning of the second century, there was an increased number, both of men and women, then living in a very advanced age, who, with a view of keeping themselves undistracted by the cares of the world, and giving their minds, with devoted ardour, to religious meditation and prayer, had declined to enter into the state of matrimony.* But by far the greater part of the primitive Christians were married; and it is no small testimony to the consistency of marriage with a free and full profession of the Gospel, that a people so distinguished as they were for their attention to all the proprieties of Christian conduct, very generally gave it the sanction of their example. With them, however, it assumed a very different aspect from that in which the nuptial relation was found among the heathens; for, while the latter looked on it as a mere worldly compact, entered into it commonly from low and selfish motives, and scrupled not to dissolve it on the most frivolous pretexts,—the former regarded it as a spiritual union, cemented by the most sacred sanctions, continued by the purest and holiest feelings, and destined to exercise a most important influence on the character and interests of husband and wife for ever. And, according to this view, no state could afford so full a scope for the exercise of every Christian disposition and virtue, as that in which two persons, united not only in the same condition, but in holding the same faith, offering the same prayers, and employing the same means of grace, passed their lives in mutual edification and encouragement, and in preparing to enjoy an eternity of blessedness together. The ends of this spiritual union were

^{*} It is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to remind the reader of the wide difference between those who, in the first ages of Christianity, voluntarily chose to remain unmarried, and those who, in a later and superstitious age, bound themselves by a public vow, and as a meritorious end, to lead a life of celibacy.

fully answered, when the persons between whom that relation was formed were both converted to Christianity. But, unhappily, it was no unfrequent occurrence in those days for one of the parties to become a Christian, while the other adhered to all the abominations and vices of idolatry; in which circumstances, there was no alternative but for the new convert to remain contented and resigned in the married state-to abound in the peace and charity of the Gospel, and to wait in faith and patience the course of events, as Providence might please to order them. But when that relation had yet to be formed, it would have been the height of imprudence and folly voluntarily to bring oneself into a position so inimical to domestic peace, as well as to the exercise and enjoyment of religion. Accordingly, it was an early and established custom with the primitive Christians to discourage such unequal matches; and as the counsel of the pastor, as well as the consent of the parents, had to be obtained previous to marriage, it is probable that the necessity of their united sanction arose from a prudent and pious desire to prevent the unhappy consequences of intermarrying with infidels, and to lead Christians to unite themselves only with adherents of the same faith.*

The first step towards marriage among the primitive Christians, was the espousals. This betrothment was nothing more than a formal agreement between the persons who had formed the purpose of marrying, made in the presence of witnesses, the number of whom was usually not less than ten, and ratified by pledges given by the man, viz., a ring, engraven with some figure emblematical of a Christian virtue, and a solemn kiss, which was a token very much in use among the Christians. On the lapse of two years, which was the usual duration of the espousals, the time for marriage arrived; and as the primitive Christians were anxious to encourage the idea of its being a spiritual union, the rite

^{*} Neander, p. 318.

was celebrated by the pastor in the church. The hair of the bride being untied—for all unmarried women had their foreheads bound with a purple fillet *-a veil was thrown over her person; and, after having received suitable admonitions, and partaken of the communion together, they were required to join their right hands, when the minister pronounced them to be married persons, and invoked a blessing on their The conclusion of the service was new relation. announced by their being adorned with garlands of flowers, emblematical of the virtue and innocence of the parties; and in that festive attire the procession moved homewards. The evening was closed with the marriage-feast, at which the relations and nearest friends only of the bridegroom and bride were present; and which was characterised by all their usual sobriety and temperance—not without being enlivened, at the same time, by the flow of that innocent cheerful mirth, in which, on proper occasions, none were so ready to indulge as the primitive Christians. †

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. iii.-Notes.

[†] At the marriage-feasts of the heathen, the grossest excesses were committed. Players were hired for the occasion, who sung and acted all sorts of obscenities. The company gave way to universal intemperance; and, so long as they were able, kept up a course of leaping, dancing, and riot, too indecent to be described. It is needless to say, that all these were banished by the Christians.

CHAPTER III.

SOCIAL MANNERS.

MUTUAL LOVE AND CONCORD OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS—CARE OF THE POOR—GONTRIBUTIONS BY FOREIGN CHURCHES—STORY OF NUMIDIAN CAPTIVES—CARE OF THE SICK—FEMALE VISITORS—PARABOLANI—CONTRAST BETWEEN THE BENEVOLENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND THE SELFISHMESS OF HEATHENS—STORY OF THE PLAGUE IN CARTHAGE—AND IN ALEXANDRIA—STORY OF PAULINUS—CARE OF CHRISTIAN PRISONERS—STORY OF PEREGRINUS—CHRISTIANS IN THE MINES—CARE OF THE SPIRITUAL INTERESTS OF MEN—VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS OF CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE—MEANS OF SUPPORTING IT—STORY OF A PERSON BEQUEATHING MONEY TO THE POOR—LOVE-FEASTS—HOSPITALITY—SALUTATIONS—OATHS—STORY—PATIENCE IN BEARING INJURIES—LOYALTY—TRIBUTE TO THE SOCIAL VIRTUES OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS BY TWO HEATHEN EMPERORS.

Among the various features in the character of the primitive Christians, there is none that so eminently claims our admiration as their mutual love. details transmitted to us of their social intercourse, and of their public conduct, bespeak the lively operation of this Christian spirit. And when we read of the delightful harmony and concord that reigned in their assemblies, their ready disposition to render to every one his due,-the high condescending to those of low degree,—the poor giving the tribute of their respect to those whom Providence had placed in a more exalted station,—and all vying, with amiable rivalry, to promote each other's happiness and welfare, we perceive the strong grounds of the proverbial observation of the heathen, "Behold how these Christians love one another!" Not only when they were small in numbers,

and, meeting together almost daily, were well known to each other, did this admirable affection prevail among them, but how widely soever they might be separated, the ardour of their love suffered no diminution; and, forgetting every other distinction in that of being the followers and friends of the Saviour, they sympathized in each other's joys and sorrows. ever blessing one of their number had received, was a subject of lively gratitude to all; and whatever calamity had befallen a single member, spread a gloom over the whole community. Bound to each other by ties infinitely holier and dearer than any that belong to the world, they looked upon themselves as members of the same common family. Every time that they met, either in their own houses or in their public assemblies, they interchanged the kiss, as a badge of fellowship, and token of the warmest affection. Though totally unconnected by ties of consanguinity, they addressed each other, according to their respective age and sex, by the name of father, mother, * brother, sister. Though naturally separated by distinction of rank and diversity of colour, nothing could cool the ardour, or prevent the reciprocities of their mutual love. The knowledge of the simple fact, that any one was a follower of Jesus, changed him at once from a stranger into a friend; creating a union between them not to be described by the cold selfish friendship of the world; and to them belongs the peculiar distinction of realizing a state of society which many philosophers had often delighted to picture to their fancy, and wished for in vain,—the idea of a community united by no other bond than the golden chain of universal love.

One very remarkable way in which this love manifested itself, was in the care they took of their poorer brethren. Among them, as in every association of men, the needy and destitute were found. The duty

^{*} A Christian husband did not give the name of mother to his wife, however far advanced in life she might be. She then received the appellation of sister.—Turner's Calumnies on the Primitive Christians accounted for.

of providing for these was not left to the gratuities of private individuals, whose situation gave them opportunities of ascertaining, and whose benevolence prompted them to relieve, their necessities. It devolved on the whole community of believers, who regarded it not as a burden, but a privilege, to minister to the wants of those who bore the image of Christ; and by their unwearied attentions to the discharge of this labour of love, they made the light of their liberality and benevolence so shine, as to command the admiration even of the cold and selfish heathers around them. As duly as the Sabbath returned, and as soon as they had brought their sacred duties to a close, the lists of the poor, the aged, the widows, and the orphans, were produced for consideration; and, as if each had been hastening to bring forth the fruits of faith, and to prove the sincerity of that love they had just professed to their Saviour by the abundance of their liberality to his people, they set themselves to the grateful task with a zeal and enthusiasm, whose fresh and unabated vigour betrayed no symptoms of their having already been engaged in a lengthened service. The custom was for every one in turn to bring under public notice the case of a brother or sister, of whose necessitous circumstances he had any knowledge, and forthwith a donation was ordered out of the funds of the church, which the voluntary contributions of the faithful supplied. No strong or heart-stirring appeals were necessary to reach the hidden source of their sympathies; no cold calculations of selfish prudence regulated the distribution of their public alms; no fears of doubtful propriety suggested delay for the consideration of the claim; no petty jealousies as to the preference of one recommendation to another, were allowed to freeze the genial current of their charity. By whomsoever the case was recommended, or in whatever circumstances the claim was made, the hand of benevolence had answered the call almost before the heart found words to express its sympathy, and with a unanimity surpassed only by their boundless love, they dealt out their supplies from the treasury of the church whenever there was an object to receive, or a known necessity to require it. Where the poor in one place were numerous, and the brethren were unable, from their limited means, to afford them adequate support, they applied to some richer church in the neighbourhood; and never was it known in those days of active benevolence, that the appeal was fruitlessly made, or coldly received. Though they had peor of their own to maintain, neighbouring and foreign churches were always ready to transmit contributions in aid of the Christians in distant parts, and many and splendid are the instances on record of ministers and people, on intelligence of any pressing emergency, hastening with their treasures for the relief of those whom they had never seen, but with whom they were united by the strong ties of the same faith and hopes. Thus, when a multitude of Christian men and women in Numidia had been taken captive by a horde of neighbouring barbarians, and when the churches to which they belonged were unable to raise the sum demanded for their ransom, they sent deputies to the church that was planted in the metropolis of North Africa; and no sooner had Cyprian, who was then at the head of it, heard a statement of the distressing case, than he commenced a subscription in behalf of the unfortunate slaves, and never relaxed his indefatigable efforts, till he had collected a sum equal to eight hundred pounds sterling, which he forwarded to the Numidian Churches, together with a letter full of Christian sympathy and tenderness.*

But the primitive Christians were not content with conveying their eleemosynary aid through the public

^{*} Cyprian. Epist. 60.—Gibbon states the sum to have been exactly £850.—Decline and Fall, chap. xv.; but others make it less than that amount.—Ryan's Effects of Religion on Mankind.

channels of the church. To them it appeared a sacred duty to countenance the poor with their presence and their purse in their own homes, where they could make more minuter inquiries into their wants, and tender them the comforts of Christian sympathy and counsel, which, by the brethren both of high and low degree, were more highly prized than even the open-handed benevolence that ministered to their temporal necessities. This pious office was more especially delegated to the female members of the community, as it was thought, both from the delicate nature of the embassy, and from the jealous spirit of ancient society, they possessed facilities of access to the domestic privacy of all classes, denied to their brethren of the other sex. And exemplary was the prudence and fidelity with which they discharged their trust. Every moment they could spare from the prior claims of their own household, the Christian matrons devoted to those errands of mercy; and, while they listened to the widow's tale of other days, and her traits of the friend who had gone to his rest,-or saw the aged in their hut of poverty, bending under the weight of years,—or sat by the bedside of the afflicted, and those that were ready to die, -or found, as was frequently the case, the helpless babe, which the frigid heart of a pagan mother had exposed and forsaken in the lonely path, they provided for the wants of each, and administered appropriate comforts both for the body and the soul.* But these were light and easy attentions compared with the duties which their charitable mission frequently imposed on them. In those days there were no public institutions for the reception of the poor, and for the medical treatment of the diseased; and as there were few or none among the heathen in private life, who ever thought of entering the abodes of poverty and sickness, and helping their neighbours, -such was the cold and unfeeling selfishness of the heathen

^{*} Ryan's Effects of Religion; Gibbon's Decline and Fall.

world,—the Christians were never without objects, in every form of human wretchedness, towards whom their benevolence was required. Indeed it is almost incredible to what offices the ardour of their Christian spirit led them to condescend. They, though all of them were women moving amid the comforts of domestic life, and some of them ladies of the highest rank, never inured to any kind of labour, scrupled not to perform the meanest and most servile offices that usually devolved on the lowest menial. Not only did they sit by the bedside of the sick, conversing with and comforting them, but with their own hands prepared their victuals, and fed them, -administered cordials and medicine, - brought them changes of clothing, -made their beds, -dressed the most repulsive and putrefying ulcers,-exposed themselves to the contagion of malignant distempers,—swaddled the bodies of the dead, -and, in short, acted in the character at once of the physician, the nurse, and the ambassador of God. Their purse and their experience were always ready, and the most exhausting and dangerous services were freely rendered by these Christian women. In process of time, however, as the Christian society extended its limits, and the victims of poverty and sickness became proportionally more numerous, the voluntary services of the matrons were found inadequate to overtake the immense field; and hence, besides the deacons and deaconesses who, at a very early period of the Church, were appointed to superintend the interests of the poor, a new class of officebearers arcse, under the name of Parabolani, whose province it was to visit and wait on the sick in malignant and pestilential diseases. These, whose number became afterwards very great—Alexandria alone, in the time of Theodosius, boasting of six hundred,took charge of the sick and the dying, under circumstances in which, while it was most desirable they should have every attention paid to them, prudence

forbade mothers and mistresses of families to repair to them; and thus, while the heathen allowed their poor and their sick to pine in wretchedness, and to die before their eyes, unpitied and uncared for, there was not, in the first ages, a solitary individual of the Christian poor who did not enjoy all the comforts of a temporal and spiritual nature that his situation required.*

It was not, however, only to the poor of their own churches that the benevolence of the primitive Christians showed itself. Never, perhaps, was the clear and lively principle of their character more strikingly exemplified than in the appearance of any of those calamities-famine or pestilence-with which the ancient world was so frequently visited. In the accounts that have reached us of those terrible catastrophes, mention is invariably made of a sad corruption of morals accompanying them, -the heathen became desperate and reckless amid the fearful ravages made in their ranks,—their sensibilities were deadened, and a most unnatural and cold-blooded indifference shown to the claims of their nearest relatives and friends. In the midst of all these disorders, the benevolence of the Christians exhibited an extraordinary contrast to the unfeeling selfishness of their heathen neighbours. Thus, for instance, during the plague that so long and severely afflicted Carthage, in the time of Cyprian, he and the rest of the Christians were indefatigable in their exertions for the relief of the afflicted; and, while the heathen abandoned the sick and dying to their fate, while the highways were strewed with corpses which no one had the courage or the public spirit to bury, and the hardened survivors were intent only on pilfering the clothes and the chests of the dead, the Christians were constantly facing the danger, busy on the streets or in the houses, distributing money or articles of food and clothing, and doing all in their power to alleviate the pangs of the sufferers, and

^{*} Cave's Primitive Christianity, part iii. Bingham, vol. ii. p. 48.

soothe the last moments of the dying. Nor was their benevolence confined to the sick members of their own community,—they extended their attentions indiscriminately to all; and, while the heathen stood aloof and careless, parents deserting their children, and children trampling on the unburied corpses of their parents, the Christians were assiduously employed in the pious labour of interring them,—the rich contributing their money, and the poor their labour, to clear the houses and the streets from the effluvia of the mouldering relics of mortality, and adopt the most prudent precautions to free the city from the farther

ravages of the pestilence."

In like manner, when the Roman empire, especially that part of it that lay in the east, was overtaken, in the reign of Gallienus, by the simultaneous calamities of plague, famine, and earthquake, the calm fortitude and unswerving resignation of the Christians,their indefatigable benevolence towards all who were seized by the dreaded sickness, and the kind sympathizing attentions they bestowed on them, at the risk of their own lives, were very strikingly exemplified in Alexandria, the chief seat of the disasters. In a letter of Dionysius, who was then pastor of the church in that city, a most impressive account is given, of which we subjoin a translation: - That pestilence appeared to the heathen as the most dreadful of all things,—as that which left them no hope; not so, however, did it seem to us, but only a peculiar and practical trial. The greater part of our people, in the abundance of their brotherly love, did not spare themselves; and, mutually attending to each other, they cheerfully visited the sick without fear, and ministered to them for the sake of Christ. Many of them died, after their care had restored others from the plague to health. The best among our brethren, priests and

^{*} Life of Cyprian; also Burton's Lecture on the Eccles. Hist. of the Second and Third Centuries.

deacons, and some who were celebrated among the laity, died in this manner; and such a death, the fruit of great piety and strong faith, is hardly inferior to martyrdom. Many who took the bodies of their Christian brethren into their hands and bosoms, closed their mouth and eyes, and buried them with every attention, soon followed them in death. But with the heathen matters stood quite differently; at the first symptom of sickness, they drove a man from their society, they tore themselves away from their dearest connections, they threw the half dead into the screets, and left thousands unburied,—endeavouring, by all the means in their power, to escape contagion, which, notwithstanding all their contrivances, it was very

difficult for them to accomplish.*

In those days, there were calamities of a different kind from famine and pestilence, that no less tried and displayed, in a captivating light, the benevolence of the primitive Christians. The land was desolated by frequent wars,—the seas were infested with horrid piracies, by both of which multitudes were carried into a distant and wretched captivity. Every fresh occurrence of such calamities moved the compassion of the Christians, and roused them to extraordinary exertions, which were often rewarded by the ransom and happy deliverance of thousands. It would fill a volume to describe the efforts which the benevolence of the Christians made in the cause of these unhappy exiles; and, therefore, we shall content ourselves with the relation of one single anecdote illustrative of them, and too romantic to be passed without notice. During the persecution raised by the Vandals in Italy, numbers of Christians who had been carried captive into the wilds of Africa, had been redeemed from bondage by the splendid liberality of an opulent man-Paulinus. Among those whom the expenditure of his princely fortune had not been able

^{*} Neander, p. 283,—Rose's Translation.

to ransom, was the only son of a widow, who, in the bitterness of her disappointment, undertook a toilsome journey to wait upon Paulinus, and prevail upon him to bestow upon her the comparatively small sum that was necessary to purchase the freedom of one young With tears Paulinus was obliged to tell her that he had already parted with his all, but that he was ready and willing to surrender himself as a slave in place of her son. The resolution, strange as it was, this benevolent man lost no time in carrying into effect. He set sail in company with the widow for Africa, and made directly for the palace of the prince in whose service the woman's son was a slave, and having offered himself and been accepted in the boy's stead, the woman and her ransomed child returned to their home in Italy, while the generous deliverer remained in humble servitude, till the prince, discovering his real character, and admiring his extraordinary disinterestedness, at length restored him to liberty.*

The benevolence of the primitive Christians being thus readily, and on all occasions, exerted in the cause of suffering humanity, it need not surprise us that the most frequent and distinguished objects of it were the sufferers for righteousness' sake. Many of these were immured in prisons; and no sooner did Fame spread abroad the sad intelligence that one of them was lying in the dungeons of a city, than the Christians of the place flocked in crowds to the doors of the cell, begging Patiently did they bear the caprice and admission. rebuffs of the surly guards and jailors; -anxiously did they resort to every means of conciliation, by persuasions, entreaties, and bribes; -often, when all proved fruitless, did they lie for days and nights together outside the walls of the dungeon, praying for the deliverance, or for the happy and triumphant exit, of the imprisoned confessor. If admitted, as they sometimes were, the brethren, most of whom were always women,

^{*} Bingham, Cave, Ryan.

carried with them beds, materials of food, clothing, and fuel,—they kissed their chains, washed their feet, and rendered them all the most tender and endearing offices they could think of. Witness the well known case of the impostor Peregrinus. This person, who lived in the second century, had been obliged to flee from his native country, Armenia, on account of some great crime, and having settled in Judea, became acquainted with the principles of the Gospel, appeared an illustrious penitent, and made public profession of the faith. His fame as a Christian spread far and wide, and when his religious tenets brought him the distinction of imprisonment, the Christians, deeply afflicted at his fate, made extraordinary efforts to procure his release. These, however, proving unsuccessful, they strove to mitigate the evils of confinement by loading him with every attention. At break of day, numbers of old women, widows, and orphans, were seen surrounding the walls of the prison, their hands filled with every delicacy, and even with large sums of money, which the liberality of foreign Christians had sent to them for their support.*

But many of the sufferers for the cause of religion, instead of being thrown into prison, were sent to labour like slaves, in distant and unwholesome mines. Thither the benevolence of their brethren followed them, and never were contributions more frequently and liberally made by the Christians, than when they were destined for the relief of the mutilated martyrs, who laboured amid the darkness and the noxious vapours of these subterranean dungeons. Nay, many even undertook long and toilsome pilgrimages, in order to comfort and support those victims of oppression with their Christian sympathy; and in the performance of the pious journeys, encountered perils, amid which, nothing but benevolence of the purest and most exalted character could have preserved their resolution

^{*} Fleury, p. 228.

firm and unshaken. A party of Christians, for instance, set out from Egypt in the depth of winter, to visit their brethren in the distant mines of Cilicia. Some of them, when the object of their visit became public, were arrested on their arrival at Cesarea, and had their eyes pulled out, and their feet dislocated. Others shared a worse fate at Ascalon, being burnt or beheaded. Various companies, who successively went from different quarters, on the benevolent errand of expressing their sympathy with the interesting miners, prosecuted their undertaking amid similar dangers. But nothing could repress the ardent wish to pour the balm of consolation into the hearts of men who were suffering the worst species of slavery for the sake of the truth. And highly were those honoured who lived to tell the tale that they had seen the martyrs in the mines,-to describe how they toiled, and wrought, and bore the chain, and to carry, above all, the glad tidings of the fortitude, the patience, resignation, and Christian joy with which they endured their bard lot.

There was one other manifestation of the benevolence of the primitive Christians, that deserves a particular notice,—their love for the souls of men. It was a remarkable feature of their character, and though inseparable from the anxiety they displayed on every occasion to promote the best interests of men, it yet occupied exclusively the minds of some of them, and gave rise to exertions which nothing but interests of eternal moment could ever have originated. Not to speak of those who dedicated themselves to the preaching of the Gospel, there were many in private life who expended every thing they could spare from the bare support of life on the purchase of Bibles, and on every suitable occasion distributed them to the poor-a gift, the value of which cannot be estimated, without taking into consideration the scarcity and the immense price which in those days a single copy of the Scriptures

cost.* But, besides this excellent species of charity, which many of the wealthier Christians devised for themselves, there were others, who involuntarily submitted to the most extraordinary sacrifices, with the generous view of bringing men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. One man, for instance, is recorded to have sold himself into the family of a heathen actor, and continued for years cheerfully performing the most servile offices, till, having been the honoured instrument of converting the husband and wife, and whole family to Christianity, he received from the grateful converts the reward of his liberty. And not long after, during a visit to Sparta, the same individual learning that the governor of that city had fallen into dangerous errors, offered himself again as a slave, and continued for two years in that humble and ignominious situation, when his zealous efforts for the conversion of his master being crowned with fresh success, he was treated no longer as a servant, but a brother beloved in the Lord.†

Time would fail us to enumerate all the various channels through which the benevolence of the primitive Christians flowed. Some dedicated themselves to the task of searching out desolate orphans, helpless widows, unfortunate tradesmen, and heathen foundlings—in those times the most numerous class of unfortunates. T Some carried their charity so far as to sit on the highways, or hire persons whose office was to perambulate the fields, for the purpose of directing wanderers, and especially benighted travellers, into the way; while others delighted to lead the blind, to succour the bruised, and to carry home such as were lame, maimed, and unable to walk.

Various were the sources whence the Christians

destitute.

* Life of Pamphilus.—Evangel, Mag., 1869. † Cave's Primitive Christianity, part iii. ‡ Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. iii. p. 73, § Bingham, Fleury. It may be proper to add, that the same benevolence and charity were shown to the heathens as to the Christian poor and

drew the ample means necessary to enable them to prosecute so extensive a system of benevolence. The most steady and available fund was the common treasury of the Church, which was supplied every Sabbath by the voluntary contributions of the faithful, and out of which there was a weekly distribution of alms to multitudes of widows, orphans, and old people, who were stated pensioners on her bounty. In cases of great or public calamity, fasts were appointed, which, by the saving effected in the daily expenses of all, even of the poor, were an approved and certain means of raising an extraordinary collection, and when that was found insufficient to meet the emergency, it not unfrequently happened that the pastors sold or melted the gold and silver plate that had been presented to their churches for sacred purposes.* Many persons, too, were in the habit of observing in private, quarterly, monthly, or weekly fasts, on which occasions, they either took little food or none at all, and transmitted the amount of their daily expenditure to the funds of the Church, while others voluntarily bound themselves to set aside a tenth part of their income for the use of the poor, and placed it, in like manner, in the Church's treasury. Besides, there were many wealthy individuals who, on their conversion to Christianity, from a spirit of ardent gratitude to the Saviour, sold their estates, and betaking themselves to manual labour or to the preaching of the Word, devoted the price of their property to benevolent purposes. † Others, who gave up their patrimony to objects of Christian benevolence, chose to retain the management in their own hands; as for example, a rich merchant who, with part of his money built a spacious house, and with the rest of it entertained all strangers travelling in his neighbourhood,

^{*} Bingham, vol. ii. p. 289; Cave's Primitive Christianity, part iii. † Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. ii. p. 111; Bingham, vol. ii. p. 270; vol. iii. p. 49-53; Fleury, p. 191.

took charge of the sick, supported the aged and infirm, gave stated alms to the poor, and on every Saturday and Sabbath caused several tables to be furnished for the refreshment of all who needed his bounty. voluntary surrender of property was very common in the early ages, and in the great majority of cases this step, doubtless, was dictated by a spirit of Christian sincerity and love. But many inconveniences were apt to result from these public bequests to the families and friends of the generous donors, and hence the pastors, in their anxiety to prevent the least appearance of evil, and to countenance no proceeding, though tending to increase their treasury, but what was just, honest, and of good report, often refused to accept of estates that were offered them, or restored them again to the surviving relations of the testator, of which the following may be given as an instance:—A certain man having no children, and no prospect of a family, destined his whole patrimony for the benefit of the poor, only reserving to himself the use of it so long as he lived. It happened that, after this destination of his fortune, he became the father of a numerous family, in consequence of which the Bishop of Carthage generously restored to him the unconditional use of his estate, and gave up all right to it in preference to the natural claims of his children.

Another story to the same effect may be subjoined, on the authority of Jerome, who had a personal knowledge of the circumstances he details. A Christian in Egypt made a public announcement that he purposed to dedicate his estate to the cause of Christian philanthropy. At his death, which happened not long after, it was discovered that he had secretly reserved a part of his fortune for his own private use,—a reservation which, although he had a perfect liberty to make, if his intentions had been declared, became stamped with a character of moral guilt, after he had professed to dispose of the whole of his money for the support

of the poor. Fame was not long in publishing this fraud to the world, and the Christians of the place, sensitively alive to the stain which such hypocrisy would cast on their name, resolved to give so strong and decided an expression of their sentiments as would prevent all imputations on the honour of Christian benevolence. A public meeting was held, at which a great multitude of persons were present, to deliberate on what was best to be done in the circumstances; and, while some proposed that the money so fraudulently hoarded should be remitted to the parents of the deceased, and a few suggested that it should be thrown into the treasury along with the rest he had formerly bequeathed, the voice of an immense majority prevailed,—that it should be buried in the grave of the owner, and that their sentence should be recorded in these memorable words: "Thy money perish with thee."* So far were the primitive Christians from proclaiming it to be a duty for the rich to part with their possessions, or from encouraging the transference of them to the treasury of the Church, that their pastors, most eminent for piety and zeal, often seized opportunities of restoring such as had been alienated, to the family and heirs of the owner;—so anxiously did they endeavour, at a time when the benevolence of some Christians was assuming a romantic character, and ambition was prompting others to signalise their names by deeds of splendid liberality, to discountenance all donations for benevolent and Christian purposes, except such as were proved to be the honest and free-will offerings of faith and love. †

A distinguishing feature in the social manners of the primitive Christians was the love-feast. It was a banquet at which persons of all classes in the Christian community sat down in familiar company,-the

^{*} Bingham, vol. iii. p. 50. † It was from their unbounded benevolence that the disciples were called by the heathens, as Tertullian informs us, not Christ'ani, but Chrestiani, from a word signifying sweetness of disposition.—Hales' Sermons.

pastor and his deacons, the aged believer and the young disciple, the opulent professor and the poorest of the flock. No seats of honour were appropriated to those that were in office, -no invidious line of distinction separated the occupiers of the head, from those who were placed at the bottom of the table. It was a feast of charity; not, however, in the common sense of the term, as if it were a splendid and public entertainment which the wealthy gave to their needier brethren, and which they condescended to countenance and grace with their presence, but, in the literal acceptation of the word, a perfect community of enjoyment, in which they met together as brethren, forgetting all other distinctions but their common union in the faith and service of Christ. And though it was not properly a religious festival, yet, celebrated as it generally was, after the close of public worship,when the minds of all were fresh from the impression of its solemn services, it was sanctified and endeared by all that is sublime and interesting to the feelings in the religion of Jesus. The way of providing and conducting this supper was as follows: The rich brought a supply of provisions with them, and when the solemnities of worship were over, they spread a table in the church, on which the voluntary contributions of all were laid; and, after a fervent invocation of the divine blessing on their social meeting, the viands were distributed to the guests. Every one ate and drank at discretion, but the strictest temperance was observed. And, indeed, this simple repast was so regulated, that it was impossible, in early times, for any excesses to be committed. During the whole continuance of the festival they joined in edifying and Christian conversation,—the richer and better educated kindly mingling with their poorer brethren, and encouraging them to state their sentiments freely on every subject. At a convenient part of the evening, some one gave a short exhortation to unity and brotherly love; and, after

others had entertained the company with the singing of a psalm, or some sacred piece of his own composi-tion, and they had joined together in prayer, they all retired to their several places of abode. It was a beautiful practice, indicating, not indeed a golden age of purity, but a state of society where, to a great extent, the disciples, acting in the character of their earliest predecessors, were of one mind and one spirit, and loved to proclaim to the world that the distinguishing badge and motto of their community was,-" By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." But this interesting custom, in the hands of Christians that did not carry to its observance the pure and exalted feelings that influenced their ancestors, soon degenerated from its primitive character, and became the occasion of many excesses; so that, from being first prohibited to be held in churches, it was afterwards found expedient to observe it only on rare occasions, till at length it fell totally into disuse, and is now associated almost exclusively with the memory of the early age that gave it birth.*

It is impossible to speak in terms of less admiration of the hospitality exercised in that age towards Christian strangers. The followers of Christ, how widely soever they were scattered throughout the world, were then united as one great family, and agreeing, as they did, in the happiest spirit of concord, to regard any local varieties of custom as matters of indifference, kept up a constant and friendly correspondence with all the branches of the Church universal, so that, whenever any of them went abroad, either on their own private affairs, or on missions connected with the state and progress of religion, they were received with open arms by the Christians of the place as brethren. Go under whatever name they might, and travel to the remotest places, among people of foreign manners and

^{*} Mosheim on the affairs of Christians, p. 151; Halkett's Notes on Scripture Texts; Edinburgh Encl., art. Agape; Fleury's Eccles. Hist., tom. i. p. 54.

an unknown tongue, the pilgrims of the faith were sure, whenever they met with a Christian, to find a friend, whose house would be thrown open for their reception, whose table would be spread for their entertainment, and who would welcome them with a warmer heart and a kindlier smile, than they were often met with by their kinsmen and acquaintance at home. In the eyes of the unconverted, it seemed an inexplicable mystery, that men, who, as Jews, had felt a contempt for all other people, and, as Gentiles, would not enjoy the hearth in common with strangers, should be on terms of the closest friendship with Christians indiscriminately, of every colour and of every name; and they looked upon it as accomplished by some secret token,—the watchword of a deep and wide-spread conspiracy,-when they saw the hand of fellowship given, and the rites of hospitality performed by such people to foreigners, whose person and character had been previously unknown to them. The heathen knew nothing of those inward feelings, that brotherly love, that fellowship of the Spirit, which created between the Christian spiritual ties, independent alike of the natural and political boundaries of the earth; and one manifestation of which was their pleasure and their readiness to open their doors, and render every hospitable attention to those of the same faith from all quarters of the world. The way was for a traveller, on arriving at any town, to seek out the church, in or about which liberal accommodation was always provided, both for the temporal and spiritual comforts of the wayfaring man. But it was seldom that the burden of lodging him was allowed to be borne by the common funds of the church,—for no sooner was the news of his arrival spread abroad, than the members vied with each other which should have the privilege of entertaining the Christian stranger at their homes; and whatever was his rank or calling, he soon found himself domiciled with brethren, whose

circumstances were similar to his own. A minister was entertained by one of his own order; a mechanic by one of the same craft or station; and even the poorest would have been readier, and have counted it a greater honour, to share his hut and his crust with a disciple like himself, than to have sat at table with the emperor of Rome. In course of time, however, this generous and open-hearted hospitality was abused. Persons unworthy to enjoy it—spies and impostors, under the assumed name of Christians-introduced themselves to the brethren in distant places, and by misrepresenting afterwards what had been told them in the unsuspecting confidence of brotherhood, and circulating calumnies prejudicial both to individuals and to the body of Christians at large, threatened to bring on the Church a variety of evils,—not the least of which would have been, that of putting an end to the ancient kindly intercourse with Christian strangers, had not a plan been happily devised, and introduced into universal practice, by which travellers were known at once to be good men and true. The plan was this: every one, on setting out on a journey, was furnished by the minister of the church to which he belonged with a letter of credence to the spiritual rulers of the place where he meant to sojourn, the presentation of which having satisfied them as to his Christian character, was instantly followed by a welcome invitation to partake of the hospitality of the church or the brethren. To prevent forgeries, these letters were folded in a particular form, which procured them the name of literæ formatæ, besides containing some secret marks within, by which the Christians of foreign parts knew them to be genuine. By these testimonials, slightly varied in external appearance according to their several purposes, -such, for instance, as their certifying the bearer's claim merely to the common entertainment of Christians, or his right to participate in all the privileges of the church, or his being sent on some embassy pertaining to the common faith,—Christians were admitted to the fellowship of their brethren in all parts of the world,—were treated by the family that received them as one of themselves,—had their feet washed by the wife on their first arrival, and at their departure were anxiously and tenderly committed to the Divine care, in a prayer by the master of the house. This last was a never-failing part of the hospitality of the times; and to have betrayed any symptoms of preferring the temporal good cheer of the friendly host to his parting benediction. would have been a death-blow to the farther credit of

the stranger.

In the general intercourse of society, the primitive Christians, acting according to the rules of Scripture, were careful to render to all their dues; honour to whom honour is due, tribute to whom tribute, and to practise every thing that is just, honest, and of good report. Their salutations to one another were made by imprinting on each other's cheek a kiss-the token of love—the emblem of brotherhood; and this, except in times of trouble and persecution, when they hastily recognised each other by the secret sign of the cross, was the constant and the only form observed by Christians when they met together. It was practised in their private houses, at their public meetings, and, indeed, on all suitable occasions, though it was considered better and more prudent to dispense with it on the public streets, to avoid giving unnecessary offence to their heathen fellow-citizens. Whenever they met their pastor, they were accustomed, from the earliest times, to bow their heads to receive his blessing, -a ceremony which, in later times, when increased respect was paid to the clerical order, was accompanied with kissing his hands and embracing his feet.* In their intercourse with their heathen friends and acquaintance, they studiously observed all the forms

^{*} Bingham, vol. i. p. 121.

of courtesy as far as circumstances allowed. But in the language of familiar life, the terms of affection and respect were so interwoven with those of worship, that the customary expressions which friends addressed to each other at meeting and parting, could not have been used without some offensive allusion to the gods; hence the Christians adopted a simpler, and, in their view, a less exceptionable way of conveying their friendly wishes and regards, corresponding nearly to our "How do you do?" and "Farewell." But the peculiarity was exceedingly distasteful to all, even to the most peaceable and candid of the heathens, and the interchange of civilities among Christians appeared to them cold and stiff, compared with the easy and lively forms of speech, which, from their infancy, they had been taught to consider sacred and inseparable from the sentiments of love and kindness.

In their transactions of business, and engagements of every kind, the primitive Christians were uniformly guided by integrity and uprightness. Detesting all embellishments in conversation, they trained themselves to the habit of using no words, either more or less, than were absolutely necessary to convey an intelligible idea of their meaning; and so far were they from approving or practising the Jesuitical art of mental reservation, that they would not have swerved a hair's-breadth from the truth, though their life might have been saved by a word. Many instances of their inflexible regard to truth at all hazards, occurred in times of persecution; and, "when the heathens charged them with folly, that they would so resolutely suffer, when a parcel of fair words might make way for them to escape, telling them, it was but saying as they were bid, - and that they might secure their consciences by mental reservation, they replied, that they counted it impious in any way to dissemble or deny the truth, and scorned to live upon any terms, by which they were forced to maintain their lives by lies

and falsehood."* So proverbial, indeed, were they for plain and honest dealing, that after their character and moral habits became known, their mere affirmation was considered a sufficient guarantee of the truth; and to put a Christian to his oath, was an extreme measure, never resorted to but on rare and special emergencies. The Christians themselves, however, were far from deeming it unlawful to take an oath on just and necessary occasions. Some of them, indeed, were so greatly afraid of being led, by any train of circumstances, to any thing bordering on the heinous sin of perjury, that they declined on that ground to take an oath. But the generality of them approved of the principle, and had no objections to bind themselves by the formality of an oath, when that solemnity was requisite for "confirmation's sake, as an end of all strife." The form in which Christians were required to swear, was, by God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, to which they generally added, the majesty of the emperor, "as being," says an ancient author, "next to God to be loved and honoured by mankind;" † and to give greater solemnity to this oath, they were accustomed frequently to accompany it with the communion. The person who administered the oath, took the hand of the swearer in which he held the sacramental elements, and joined it in his own, or he made him approach the communion table, and, laying his hand on the holy Gospels, take the oath in that solemn manner.‡ The following story affords an interesting example of this: - In the year 259, in the reign of Gallienus, a lucrative office fell vacant at Cæsarea, to which a highly qualified person of the name of Marinus was about to be promoted, when one of the disappointed candidates gave information that he was a Christian. It was at that time unlaw-

^{*} Justin Martyr, quoted by Cave. Primitive Christianity, part iii.chap.i.
† Vegetius, quoted by Cave. Primitive Christianity, part iii. chap. i.
‡ Ibid.

ful for a Christian to be in office; and the judge having made inquiry, and found that Marinus was an adherent of the forbidden faith, gave him a respite of three hours, to determine whether he would abandon his religion, or forfeit his life. During that awful interval, the bishop of Cæsarea obtained an interview with him, and carrying him into the church, offered him the choice of a Bible or a sword. Without hesitation he laid his hand on the Scriptures, and being thus solemnly sworn to remain stedfast and immoveable in the cause of Christ, he forthwith left the church, repaired to the tribunal of the prætor, and announcing that he had bound himself by an oath to continue a Christian, was ordered for execution on

the spot.

Their patience in bearing injuries was singular, and it was as singularly tried. An opportunity will occur in a future part of this volume to specify their trials; but, in the meantime, let the reader place himself, by an effort of imagination, in the state of society in which the Christians lived; let him figure to his mind an humble, unobtrusive, and peaceable, but somewhat peculiar class of people, surrounded on all sides by multitudes knowing little or nothing of them or their principles, and from the little they knew, feeling a sovereign contempt for both, which the heathen were allowed with impunity to take every opportunity of expressing, by jostling them on the streets, pointing to them with the finger of ridicule, addressing them by cant terms of reproach, and persecuting them by a thousand petty annoyances in every-day life, and he will form some idea of the severe ordeal to which the patience of the primitive Christians was daily subjected. But inured as they were to calumny and reproach, and taught to expect these as the inheritance in this life of all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, they bore them with meekness, and sought deliverance from the malice of their enemies by no other weapons than that of exemplifying the excellence of their principles by the dignified and holy propriety of their lives. Their property, their liberty, and even their lives, they freely surrendered, rather than lose that peace of mind which they found in the performance of Christian duty, or suffer those principles to be violated, which they valued more highly than their dearest possessions. Some of them, indeed, from a mistaken interpretation of several passages of Scripture, carried their views of Christian obedience so far, as when smote upon the one cheek, to turn the other, and when robbed of their coat, to give the cloak also. But the great majority of them, more wisely considering these as proverbial forms of speech, designed to inculcate a general spirit of patience and forbearance, scrupled not to defend themselves from violence and rapine whensoever assailed,-to avail themselves of the protection and redress of their wrongs, which the laws of their country afforded,—and to assert, as Paul did before them, when occasion required, the rights of citizenship against the arbitrary procedure of the magistrates themselves. In matters of dispute, however, between one another, the Christians seldom or never resorted to the tribunals of the heathen deputies, but were in the habit of submitting their subjects of contention to the arbitration of some of their Christian brethren.* From the earliest times, this office of arbiter was, by common consent, devolved on the pastors of the Church; and hence, as the degree of respect and veneration in which the sacred order was held, increased rather than diminished in the succeeding centuries, and as such unbounded confidence was placed in their Christian wisdom and impartiality, that all parties were disposed cheerfully to acquiesce in the awards of the spiritual judges,—one constant source of employment to the bishops of the primitive church was the determination of secular causes referred

^{*} Bingham, vol. i. p. 112; also vol. ii. p. 294.

to them by the members of their flock. Ambrose and Augustine have both left it on record, that they devoted the early part of every day to hearing and considering the disputed points on which they were requested to sit in judgment. Such being the popular influence of the Christian ministers, and the good effects of the prudence, mildness, and integrity that characterised their arbitrations being so manifest, the power was legally conferred on them, after the establishment of Christianity, of deciding all secular and other causes, with the exception of criminal cases alone, which, as more immediately affecting the peace and tranquillity of the State, the emperors reserved to

themselves and their deputies.

With such a disposition to lead quiet and peaceable lives, it may be anticipated that another eminent feature in their social manners was loyalty to the public authorities. Their grand principle was to unite the fear of God with honour to the king; and, indeed, among the millions that owned subjection to the Roman yoke, there was no class of subjects that excelled or equalled the Christians in willing and faithful obedience to the laws and institutions of the empire. will of the Cæsars was their law; and never did they hesitate a moment to comply with the imperial orders, except in the case of those urgent and tyrannical edicts which enjoined them to participate in the service of idolatry. In the time of Pliny, for example, the lovefeasts celebrated by the Christians of Palestine had given umbrage to that governor, on account of a prevailing suspicion that they had been instituted for the promotion of political objects, and were secret nurseries of sedition and crime. The Christians knew that they were harmless meetings, and were, moreover, strongly attached to them as admirable schools for the exercise of Christian piety and love. But no sooner had the proclamation of the emperor reached them, enjoining the immediate suppression of these assem-

blies, than, knowing that their compliance, however painful, did not involve any direct violation of their fidelity to Christ, they unanimously resolved to discontinue them.* Moreover, it is a remarkable fact, that the ancient historians, pagans though they were, and glad of every circumstance that could throw a stain on the religion of Jesus, do not mention a solitary case of a Christian being brought to punishment for any crime but that of his religion. Although, during the three first centuries, the imperial throne was filled by a Nero, a Caligula, and a Domitian, and their reigns were disturbed by many intestine disorders; although conspiracies were formed in the palace, mutinies broke out among the soldiers, and insurrections were organized and headed openly by the most powerful men of the times, wearied with the enormities, and impatient for the death of the inhuman tyrants, yet no Christian was ever found in the ranks of the disaffected, or was known to countenance, in any way, their deeds of violence and insubordination. Let the rulers have been ever so profligate, and their administrations ever so tyrannical, the Christians set no limits to their civil obedience, except it interfered with the claims of religion; and although they formed a numerous body in all parts of the empire, and multitudes served in the army, which was then the grand arbiter of the destinies of the world, they never took advantage of their numbers, nor used their arms in any office but that of executing the commands and supporting the throne of their legitimate ruler. Nay, they made it a prominent part of their sacred service, in the weekly assemblies, to pray for governors, and for all in authority over them; and not content with praying for the preservation of their life and the prosperity of their government, they acted on the principle of giving to Cesar the things that were Cesar's, as sacredly as on that of giving to God the things that were God's. This was

^{*} Fleury, Mœurs des Chretiens, chap. xiii.

a maxim frequently on their lips; and sooner would a Christian trader have seen his business decline, and himself reduced to beggary, than have polluted his shelves with contraband merchandise,—sooner would a Christian family have wanted the veriest necessaries of life, than have allowed any smuggled articles to appear at their table. Instead of attempting to evade the imposts, which the profligate expenditure of the government had then made oppressively heavy, or giving false or unfaithful returns to the local boards of excise, they shrunk from the idea of defrauding the revenues in the smallest item of their consumpt that was taxable; and so exemplary was their fidelity in this respect, that they could appeal to it as a matter "For your taxes and tributes," of public notoriety. says Justin Martyr, "we, more than all other men, are ever ready to meet the demands of your collectors and officers."*

We close this rapid sketch of the social manners of the primitive Christians, with the high tribute paid to their public and civic virtues by two of their contemporaries, whose exalted rank and strong predilections for heathenism give a weight to their testimony which none of the Christian apologists, however faithful and honest, possess. The Emperor Julian, in a letter to Arsacius, high priest of Galatia, among other things relating to the Christians, takes occasion to dwell upon it as a well known fact, that the Christians were pre-eminent in their attentions to the sick, the infirm, and the aged,—in their hospitality to strangers, in their peaceable deportment to others, and their pious care of the dead; and presses home on his illustrious correspondent, that there was no hope of paganism regaining the ascendancy, except by its adherents, especially the priests, imitating the virtues of the Christians, in abstaining from the theatre, the tavern, and all scandalous pursuits and pleasures, -in a dili-

^{*} Justin Martyr, Apol. 2.

gent attention to business, charity to the indigent, and a hospitable entertainment of the friendless and the stranger.* The Emperor Severus passed, perhaps, a higher eulogy than even this of Julian, on the social manners of the Christians. Observing the excellence of their conduct, as citizens, soldiers, and servants, and their fidelity in every department of public and private life, he inquired into their principles; and having been informed that one grand rule of theirs was, "Not to do to others what they would not have done to themselves," he was so charmed with it, that at all public executions he ordered it to be proclaimed aloud by a herald, and caused it to be inscribed, in legible characters, on the walls of his palace, and on all public buildings, that in every street, and on every occasion, his subjects might not be without so excellent a monitor to regulate their social manners.+

^{*} Bingham, vol. ii. p. 293. † Life of Alexander Severus, chap. xliu.

CHAPTER IV.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO PUBLIC WORSHIP.

PLACES FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP—UPPER ROOMS—HEATHEN TEMPLES CON-VERTED INTO CHURCHES — AND HOW — AREA — FOUNTAIN — PORCH— DIFFERENT CLASSES OF WORSHIPPERS SAT APART—PLACES FOR READ-ING SCRIPTURES—TEXTS ON WALLS—HISTORICAL PICTURES—VIGILS —MORNING AND EVENING SERVICE—LORD'S DAY KEPT AS A FESTIVAL —ROUTINE OF SERVICE.

From the earliest period the primitive Christians had places appropriated to divine service. No sooner was a considerable number of persons converted in any city to the faith of the Gospel, than they began to meet together, on stated occasions, for social worship; and propriety, no less than convenience, required that these assemblies should be held in a place suitable, in point both of accommodation and privacy, for celebrating the solemn offices of religion. The simple character of Christianity admitted of those local advantages being enjoyed in edifices of the plainest and humblest description; for, as it prescribed no gorgeous rites, no altars, from which the smoke of incense might ascend, and the bleeding victim pour the stream of expiation, -no outward pomp or elaborate decoration, —no embodied emblems of the Deity, nor representations of departed worth and greatness, demanding the reverence and admiration of its adherents, it called for no majestic and splendid structures, like those which concealed, in awful majesty, the rituals both of the

Jewish and the Gentile faith. Addressing itself to the heart, not the imagination of man, it relied for its success on its own native truth and energy, rather than on the adventitious aid of sensible attractions; and, while the religion of the heathen was altogether a system of outward pomp and ceremony, and required the column, the portico, the rich workmanship, and imposing grandeur of a temple as essential to its existence, the few and simple rites of Christianity might be performed in any place, however unadorned or obscure, -" where two or three were met together in the name of Christ." The Christians of the primitive age, whom peculiar circumstances led to think all works of art inseparable from the service of idolatry and vice, would have deemed their privileges marred, and their worship desecrated, by the introduction of architectural ornament into the church, even had they enjoyed the means and the liberty to gratify a taste for such elegancies; but, from the secret jealousy or open hostility of the public authorities, they could boast of no public buildings for the service of their faith during the greater part of the three first centuries; and the only place where they held their meetings for social worship, was an apartment of some wealthy believer, voluntarily surrendered for the use of the Christian community. Accordingly we find, from the Acts of the Apostles, that those who composed the first assembly of Christians met in an upper room, which was obviously selected from being, according to the Eastern style of building, always the most spacious chamber of a house; and the language of the sacred historian warrants the belief that that was the stated place of meeting for the Christians in Jerusalem,—the same church where the apostles received the Holv Ghost, the deacons were chosen, and the celebrated council convened, of which James was the president. appears, too, from the frequent salutations addressed by Paul to the church that was in the house of some

private individual, that as the number of the disciples increased, and all could not conveniently assemble in one place, it was customary for Christians of rank and opulence, in large cities, such as Rome, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus, to appropriate rooms of their dwelling to the public services of religion, -where, on account of their being nearer their residence and their places of business, the brethren of the district daily resorted. In such apartments, concealed under the exterior of an ordinary dwelling-house, and marked by nothing that indicated their being appropriated to a holy purpose, the primitive Christians met as brethren. Under the shelter of domestic privacy, they could perform their devotions without offending the popular feelings, or committing any violation of the imperial orders. No change was made on the furniture and appearance of the chamber, as the only preparation consisted in the introduction of a covered table, on which a copy of the Scriptures was laid, a couch close to it for the presiding minister, and a few benches, suitably arranged, for the accommodation of the worshippers; and there they were daily, with one accord, enjoying the privileges, and exhorting one another to the duties, of their common faith, without altering, for a century and a half, their mode and place of meeting, except when compelled to flee from their simple church above, to the receptacles for the dead under, ground. During the sanguinary persecutions that assailed the primitive disciples, the myrmidons of imperial vengeance often broke in upon their worship, dispersed their assemblies, and violently dispossessed them of the "upper rooms" in which they were wont to congregate; and in these circumstances, while some fled to the mountains and some to the deserts, multitudes took permanent refuge in the spacious cemeteries that were situated in the outskirts of the ancient cities. Amid the deep and unbroken solitude of the catacombs, -places of abode less irksome, perhaps, from the ancient style of building,

than we are apt to imagine, *-they solaced and animated one another from midnight to dawn, with spiritual exhortations to constancy in the faith; and, while the sword of vengeance was sheathed, and the fury of their persecutors slumbered in the night, they continued, in these undiscovered retreats, their wonted exercises of prayer and praise. About forty-three of such subterranean excavations still remain in the neighbourhood of Rome alone, containing the most convincing evidences that they were employed for the ordinances of religion, as well as for concealment; † and when we consider that numbers died, and deposited their bones there, some of whom had eminently distinguished themselves as martyrs in the cause of Christ, it is not difficult to imagine the strong emotions that would animate the primitive Christians for the venerable dust that surrounded them, and the intense power which religion would acquire over their minds, in places which served at once for the offices of worship and for the burial of the saints. ;

History gives no authentic information as to the time when the Christians first enjoyed the privilege of rearing buildings specially adapted to the service of their religion. Some indistinct notices occur, indeed, of their being in possession of churches so early as the beginning of the second century. But, as we find them generally accused by their adversaries, at that same period, of having no temples, it is probable, that if there were such edifices in existence, the fact was not publicly known to the heathen; and it was only in the beginning of the reign of Diocletian, who assumed the purple about the year 285, and when multitudes of Christians filled places at court, and were even

^{*} Before the manufacture of glass, light was admitted into houses only through a small aperture above the door; and, as may be supposed, the inmates knew little difference between day and night.—Hope's Architecture.

[†] Addison's Travels in Italy; Sir William Gell's Subterranean Rome. ‡ Burton's Lectures on the Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries.

promoted to high civil offices, that the people of that persuasion began openly to have religious houses, in which they celebrated the rites of their faith, and which were outwardly adorned with some of the graces of architectural ornament.* It was not, however, till the establishment of Christianity by Constantine, that churches were erected, either in great numbers, or of a splendid order. Then, for the first time, the Christians could boast of edifices which vied in architectural splendour with the structures of the ancient superstition; for, while many of them were reared by the munificence of private individuals, who found it then safe to expend their money in that species of Christian benevolence, numbers of them had been formerly heathen temples, the materials of which, after they had been demolished, were used to construct entirely new buildings, or which were at once converted into churches, and expiated by surmounting them with the sign of the cross.† spot chosen for the site of a new church was generally an elevated piece of ground, consecrated by being the burying-place of a martyr,—the primitive Christians deeming a church built over the remains of those who were faithful unto death, a more suitable memorial of their excellencies, than a monumental pillar erected It accordingly received their name, to their honour. which was inscribed on the front of the edifice. The church was approached through a spacious area, in the middle of which was a fountain, in which every one, as he entered, washed his hands—an act intended for a significant memorial of the purity of heart that alone can constitute an acceptable worshipper. ‡ The entrance was formed by a longitudinal porch, within which kings laid down their crowns, soldiers their arms, and magistrates or judges the insignia of their office. § At one end of it stood poor strangers, or such

Orsi Istor Eccles., vol. iii. p. 53; Bingham, vol. iii. p. 275.
 † Bingham, vol. iii. p. 145; vol. vii. p. 200.
 † Bingham, vol. iii. p. 281.
 § Bingham, vol. iii. pp. 163, 284.

of that destitute order as, from their distress being recent and sudden, were allowed to make known their wants by asking alms of their brethren,—while on the opposite side were stationed gross offenders, who, being excommunicated, and deprived of the privilege of entering the church, implored on their bended knees, and with all the agony of remorse and the deepest affliction, the prayers and sympathies of the faithful. The interior of the building—which was often in the form of a cross, or an eight-sided figure, but most generally of an oblong shape, resembling that of a ship-was divided into different compartments, corresponding to the different classes of hearers that composed the primitive Church. The penitents—under which term were included all offenders who had made some progress in their course of discipline-occupied the first place on passing from the porch. Next to them were those new converts who were preparing for baptism,—while the body of the church was filled by the congregation of the faithful,-widows and young women by themselves, and the young men by themselves,—the men with their sons, the women with their daughters, sitting apart from each other, either on opposite sides of the church, or, as was frequently the case, the male part of the audience remained on the ground floor, while the females had a gallery appropriated for their use. At the farther end, opposite the main entrance, was the pulpit, or elevated bench, from which the minister read the Scriptures and exhorted the people; and immediately behind this was the place set apart for celebrating the communion, the consecrated elements of which were deposited on a plain moveable table, covered with a white cloth.* Here and there were niches in the walls,

^{*} This was the form of the communion table during the three first centuries. In later times, it became more splendid, was fixed, and immoveable, being frequently made of stone, decorated with crimson cloth, and dignified with the name of altar. But this change did not take place until Christianity became corrupted from its original simplicity, and men, being ignorant of the nature and import of the memorial of the Lord's

sufficiently large to hold one or two persons, each of which was furnished with a copy of the Scriptures, for the use of those who might choose to retire in the intervals of public worship, to read and to meditate in these little recesses.* Besides this provision, invaluable in those days, when books were all in manuscript and costly in price, texts of Scripture appropriate to each class of hearers were inscribed on that part of the wall that lay immediately contiguous to the place they occupied in the church, and were so selected, as to be perpetual remembrancers of the temptations incident to their age, of the duties belonging to their condition, and the motives and encouragements to stedfastness in faith and virtue. Thus, to let one example suffice, over the space assigned to the young women, was engraven in large characters this passage of Paul, 1 Cor. vii. 34: "There is difference between a wife and a virgin; the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit." For the benefit of those who could not profit by such means of Christian instruction, the custom was latterly introduced of decorating the walls of churches with pictures of the scenes and characters of sacred history. Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit,-Joseph sold by his brethren,-David encountering Goliah,-Solomon dedicating his temple, -Mary and the infant Jesus,-the Saviour expiring on the cross, were delineated to the eye, intended, like historical paintings, to keep in remembrance the persons and events they were meant to represent, and especially to enable the illiterate to read that in the picture which they had not education enough to do in the book. It was towards the end of the third

death, began to consider it in the light of a sacrifice. It may be proper to

add, that the communion table was not close to the wall, but so situated, that it could be surrounded by the guests.

* In the year that Constantine transferred the seat of empire to Constantinople, he erected several splendid churches; and, that these might be provided with Bibles, he ordered fifty copies to be transcribed for that use .- Cave's Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. p. 22.

century when this innovation crept into the Church; and although, doubtless, it sprang from a pious and well-meaning zeal for the instruction of the ignorant, vet it was an imprudent measure, productive of the worst consequences, and tending to accelerate the superstition which was then advancing with gigantic strides over the whole Christian world. Up to that period the Church had kept itself pure and inviolate from the sanction of any sensible representations either of God or of man; and in the only instance recorded, prior to this date, of any thing approaching to a human figure being hung up in a church, the pious father who discovered a painting of Christ on a curtain when travelling through a little village of Palestine, got admission into the sacred edifice, and tore the drapery in pieces, being horror-struck at the

daring sin.

It remains only to notice, in this description of the places of worship, the profound respect and reverence the primitive Christians paid to those houses that were dedicated to the honour and worship of God. Habitually grave in their deportment, they assumed more than wonted gravity the moment they stepped within the threshold of a church; and mindful of the majesty of Him into whose palace they had come, they studied to avoid every look and gesture that became not the presence-chamber of the Deity. The feelings of sacredness they attached to the destination of the place were naturally, ere long, transferred to the building itself; and hence arose the custom, which the Christian emperors afterwards established into a law, of making the churches sanctuaries for the protection of those who fled to them. This privilege of security, however, was not open to all indiscriminately, or designed to screen delinquents from the merited punishment of their crimes. It was a provision only for those who had unintentionally committed a fault, or who were unjustly accused, to afford them time to vindicate their innocence. The protection extended to thirty days, during which period ample opportunity was supposed to be given for refuting a calumny, or terminating a strife; and if, on the expiry of this term, the fugitive failed to clear himself, he was left to the regular course of the law. It was, no doubt, a humane custom, which sprang from the benevolent spirit of Christianity, and which still remains an interesting example of the softening effects it produced on the habits both of private and public life. But in this practice the discerning reader will not fail to perceive the early traces of that disposition which led men into a superstitious reverence for every object of nature or of art, that was connected with a place of worship.

From describing the places of public worship among the primitive Christians, we proceed to notice the seasons of their public service. Setting, as they did, a high value on the appointed ordinances of grace, they felt a corresponding anxiety to enjoy the benefits these are fitted to impart, and knowing from experience, that a sudden transition from the world to the church, from the scenes and employments of sense, to the sublime objects of faith, tends to disqualify the mind for a free and full surrender of its powers to the influence of religion, they resorted to the most careful and elaborate means of acquiring that devotional frame which is becoming the sanctuary. With this view, they were accustomed to dedicate the whole of the night preceding the first day of the week, and the return of any of the great festivals of the Church, to religious exercises; and lest either their bodies or their minds should be exhausted by the tedium of such protracted vigils, they endeavoured to give such a variety to these spiritual occupations, as would lend a fresh and undiminishing interest to every part of the preparatory service. Repairing at midnight to the church, the brethren engaged for a while in private devotion, as preliminary to the duties of the occasion, and then,

after this introductory service was over, the rest of the time was consumed in singing psalms, reading the Scriptures, and prayer. The passages selected from the Word of God were chiefly such as related to the plan of redemption, and the fulness of mercy and grace contained in the divine covenant—to the moral beauty and happiness of the people of God-to the love of Christ, and the blessedness of those mansions which he has gone to prepare. The reading of these, with the glowing exhortations that were founded on them, and short prayers, breathing the most fervent desires that the promises might be realized in the experience of all, were themes dwelt upon, on such occasions, with a delight, which repetition, instead of diminishing, served only to increase. At intervals unbroken silence reigned in the meeting; every one engaged in private prayer—an occupation which always bore a prominent part in the order of such assemblies, and was performed in a kneeling posture, as most suitable to confession of sins, and feelings of humility.

But the singing of psalms was their chief and favourite occupation; and the Christians of the primitive age seem to have been as fully aware, as some of the eminent leaders of religious sects in modern times, of the great power of sacred melody to inflame the ardour of the affections, and lead captive the most tender sensibilities of the soul. In this exercise they engaged with all the fondness of a passion; and if, as the night advanced, they occasionally gave way to the soft influence of slumber, or had felt at times, during the hortatory and devotional parts of the service, that though the spirit was willing the flesh was weak, yet, ever and anon as the strains of a new melody arose, they returned to the grateful employment with an animation and a pleasure that made the hours fly unheeded away. The concert consisted chiefly of the Psalms of David, intermingled, however, at intervals, with metrical pieces on sacred subjects, composed by

individuals belonging to the Christian society, and adapted to some well known airs. At the commencement of the service all joined simultaneously in the interesting task, and the united voice of the assembly bore aloft, in full and sublime harmony, the notes of praise. At a later period, they sometimes divided themselves into two parts, and responded in alternate chants, while at other times one of the brethren sang alone, and the rest joined in universal chorus at the conclusion of every stanza. One anthem, called Hallelujah, was frequently sung by the whole congregation, in which the words, Holy, Holy, Were thrice repeated. The whole melody was of the most overpowering description; and when they approached the repetition of that sublime ascription, and dwelt upon it with varying cadence—their voices now soft and low, like the gentle murmur of a streamlet—now strong, loud, and sublime, like the rush of many waters, the feelings of the worshippers, carried along by the full tide of vocal harmony, were rapt into a pitch of seraphic devotion, and seemed as if the veil of mortality was removed, and they had joined the angelic choir, who surround the throne of heaven. The duration of these vocal exercises, which were found so suited to the taste, and so conducive to the spiritual edification of the Christians, was regulated by no rule but the time and comfort of the meeting. If the psalms were long, they were divided into parts, and a pause was made in the singing, to be occupied either in conversation on kindred topics, or in solitary meditation, as was most agreeable to the feelings of each individual, and on a given signal they resumed the chant, till they finished the sacred poem. At these midnight conventions, thirty, forty, and even fifty psalms were often sung, for they continued during the whole of the night, and never allowed their course of preparation to be brought to a close, till the morning sun, announcing the arrival of the sacred day, they gave each other the kiss of peace, and

departed for a while,—to meet again when the public

mid-day service of the church should begin.*

The advantages derived from these protracted vigils, the high tone of devotion they inspired, the congeniality of mind they fostered for the offices of public worship and the occupations of the sanctuary, led the primitive Christians to long for a more frequent observance of them than the periodical return of the Lord's day, and other sacred festivals, allowed; and hence, under a conviction that such social meetings, held at the commencement and at the close of every day, would prove an admirable preparation for the duties and the trials of ordinary life, they adopted the practice of having morning and evening service daily in the church. The hours were fixed so as not to interfere with the routine of ordinary business, and as it was impossible for them, every day, to pursue a round of religious exercises for so long a period as the pernoctations we have described above, the service was reduced to a comparatively small compass. Long before daylight they assembled and opened their meeting with the 63d Psalm, the exordium of which, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee," as well as the whole strain of that pious effusion, made it an appropriate commencement of the duties of every day. They then united in prayer, the burden of which was a supplication for the divine blessing and favour on the members of the household of faith, and for the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. This was followed by the reading of a short and appropriate passage of Scripture, after which they sang the 90th Psalm, so pathetically descriptive of the frailty and uncertainty of life, and then embodied their sentiments on this subject in a second prayer, in which they expressed their sense of dependence on the care of the Almighty, and their gratitude for their common preservation during the previous night. Another portion

^{*} Bingham, vol. v. p. 289; Cave's Primitive Christianity, part i. chap. vii.

of the Divine Word being read, the whole service—scarcely, if ever, exceeding the limits of an hour—was brought to a close by the singing of the 51st Psalm, and a corresponding prayer, in both of which they implored the divine mercy to pardon the sins of their past life, and the divine grace to help them amid the

exigencies of their future course.

The evening service was conducted on the same plan as that of the antelucan meeting, only diversified, of course, by a set of psalms, and a strain of devotional sentiments appropriate to the change of time and circumstances. It began with the 141st Psalm, and a prayer, in which, like the corresponding one in the morning oblation, the divine love was supplicated on the brethren, an extract from the Gospels or Epistles was read, and after this, as the evening meeting generally took place at the time of lighting candles, they sung a hymn, in which they gave thanks both for natural and spiritual light, and then prayed a second time for a continuance of the bounty and grace of the Lord. Such were the pious habits of the primitive Christians, that not content with the devotions of the family and the closet, they attended duly, as the season returned, the celebration of morning and evening service in the church. Nor was it only the more devout and zealous of them that pursued this daily routine of religious observances. The place of worship was thronged with all ranks of the faithful as much during the morning and evening service, as during that of the Sabbath, and they would have afforded good reason to suspect the sincerity of their religious profession, who should in those days of Christian simplicity and devotedness, have confined themselves to the hebdomadal ordinance of the sanctuary. Persons who, from sickness, or travelling, or confinement in prison, were prevented from enjoying the privilege of repairing to the assembly of their brethren, carefully observed in private those hours of daily prayer; and men, whose time was engrossed during the day with the labours of the field or the shop—with the speculations of commerce, or the offices of civil and judicial stations, "rose early before day, and never engaged in any of their most necessary and ordinary worldly business, before they had consecrated the first-fruits of all their actions and labours to God, by going to church, and presenting themselves in the Divine presence."*

But the principal season of public worship among the primitive Christians was the first day of the week. From the time of the apostles, it was customary for the disciples of Christ, both in town and country, to meet in some common accessible place on the return of that day; and while on other occasions, such as those we have described, it was left to every one to frequent the assemblies of the brethren as inclination dictated or convenience allowed, the sanction of apostolic example at once elevated attendance on the religious meetings of that period to the rank of a sacred duty, and an invaluable privilege. The high and holy character the Christians of the primitive age attached to it, is sufficiently indicated by their styling it the Lord's day; and, from the glorious event of which it was the stated memorial, they hailed it as a weekly festival, on which no other sentiment was becoming or lawful but that of unbounded spiritual joy. Hence fasting, which was so frequently practised in the ancient Church, and was allowable on every other day, was strictly prohibited on this; and even the most rigid of the primitive Christians, who sought to aim at more than ordinary heights of virtue by the practice of austerity and mortification, laid aside their habitual aspect of sorrow, as inconsistent with the joyful feelings that season inspired. With one accord they dedicated it to the worship of their exalted Redeemer, and to meditation on the things pertaining

^{*} Bingham, vol. v. p. 339.

to the common salvation; and the spiritual views with which they entered on its observance, the congenial tempers with which all repaired to the place of assembly, the common desire that animated every bosom to seek the Lord there, if haply they might find him, and to hold fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, was at once an evidence and a means of the high-toned piety that distinguished them. Early on the Saturday it was their practice to accomplish the duties of their household, and fulfil the necessary demands of their business, so that no secular care might disturb the enjoyment of the sacred day, or impede the current of their spiritual affections; and severe indeed was the indisposition, remote the situation, imperious the cause, that detained any from the scenes and occupations the first day of the week brought along with it. So long as heathenism retained the ascendant, and the disciples of the new and rival religion were at the mercy of their pagan masters, it was only during the night, or early in the morning, they could enjoy the privileges of the Christian Sabbath; nor could they observe any regular order in their service, at a time when the voice of psalms was liable to betray the secret assembly,—and the ruthless soldier often dispersed the brethren in the middle of their devotions, or compelled them to leave a glowing exhortation unfinished. But the moment the sword of persecution was sheathed, and the religion of Jesus enjoyed the tolerant smiles of a heathen, or the paternal auspices of a Christian, emperor, the Christians resumed their much valued assemblies on the Lord's day,—established a certain order in the routine of their service, suited to the constitution and circumstances of the primitive Church; and such was the happy understanding among the brethren every where, that, with some trifling variations required in particular places, a beautiful uniformity in worship and discipline may be said to have prevailed in all parts of

the Christian world. Viewing the Lord's day as a spiritual festivity, a season on which their souls were specially to magnify the Lord, and their spirits to rejoice in God their Saviour, they introduced the services of the day with psalmody, which was followed by select portions of the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles; the intervals between which were occupied by the faithful in private devotions.* The plan of service, in short, resembled what was followed in that of the vigils, though there were some important differences, which we shall now describe. The men prayed with their heads bare, and the women were veiled, as became the modesty of their sex, both standing-a posture deemed the most decent, and suited to their exalted notions of the weekly solemnity—with their eyes lifted up to heaven, and their hands extended in the form of a cross, the better to keep them in remembrance of Him, whose death had opened up the way of access to the Divine presence. The reading of the sacred volume constituted an important and indispensable part of the observance; and the more effectually to impress it on the memories of the audience, the lessons were always short, and of frequent recurrence. Besides the Scriptures, they were accustomed to read aloud several other books for the edification and interest of the people—such as treatises on the illustration of Christian morals, by some pastor of eminent reputation and piety, or letters from foreign churches, containing an account of the state and progress of the Gospel. This part of the service—most necessary and valuable at a time when a large proportion of every congregation were acquainted with letters-was performed at first by the presiding minister, but was afterwards devolved on an officer appointed for that object, who, when proceeding to the discharge of his duty, if it related to any part of the history of Jesus,

^{*} Bingham, vol. vi. chap. iv.; Cave's Primitive Christianity, part i. chap. 7; Fleury, Mœurs des Chretiens, chap. xiv.; Thorndyke on Religious Assemblies, chap. x.

exclaimed aloud to the people, "Stand up—the Gospels are going to be read;" and then always commenced with, "Thus saith the Lord." They assumed this attitude, not only from a conviction that it was the most respectful posture in which to listen to the counsels of the King of kings, but with a view to keep alive the attention of the people—an object which, in some churches, was sought to be gained by the minister stopping in the middle of a scriptural quotation, and leaving the people to finish it aloud.* The discourses, founded for the most part on the last portion of Scripture that was read, were short, plain, and extemporary exhortations,-designed chiefly to stir up the minds of the brethren by way of remembrance, and always prefaced by the salutation, "Peace be unto you." they were very short-sometimes not extending to more than eight or ten minutes' duration—several of them were delivered at a diet, and the preacher was usually the pastor of the place, though he sometimes, at his discretion, invited a stranger, or one of his brethren, known to possess the talent of public speaking, to address the assembly. The close of the sermon by himself, which was always the last of the series, was the signal for the public prayers to commence. Previous to this solemn part of the service, however, a crier commanded infidels of any description that might be present to withdraw, and the doors being closed and guarded, the pastor proceeded to pronounce a prayer, the burden of which was made to bear a special reference to the circumstances of the various classes who, in the primitive Church, were not admitted to a full participation in the privileges of the faithful. First of all, he prayed, in name of the whole company of believers, for the catechumens—young persons, or recent converts from heathenism, who were passing through a preparatory course of instruction in the doctrines and duties

^{*} Augustine, for instance, having introduced in one of his sermons these words of Paul—The end of the commandment is charity,—stopped; and the whole people immediately cried out,—out of a pure heart.

of Christianity,—that their understandings might be enlightened—their hearts receive the truth in the love of it—and that they might be led to cultivate those holy habits of heart and life, by which they might adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. Next, he prayed for the penitents, who were undergoing the discipline of the Church, that they might receive deep and permanent impressions of the exceeding sinfulness of sin,—that they might be filled with godly sorrow, and might have grace, during the appointed term of their probation, to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. In like manner, he made appropriate supplications for other descriptions of persons, each of whom left the church when the class to which be belonged had been commended to the God of all grace; and then the brethren, reduced by these successive departures to an approved company of the faithful, proceeded to the holy service of communion.*

^{*} In the East, where multitudes of the Christians were Jews, who still retained a passionate attachment to the law of Moses, Saturday was long observed as a day of public worship, though not regarded by the Christians in the same light, and of the same character with the first day of the week. Wednesday and Friday began, at an early period, to be held as weekly fasts, which never terminated till three in the afternoon. A number of public festivals were also introduced, in commemoration of the birth, ascension, and other events in the life of Christ,—some of which, Easter, for instance, can boast of a most venerable antiquity, and of universal observance.—See Routh's Reliquiæ Sacræ, vol. iii. p. 236; and Nelson's Festivals.

CHAPTER V.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO PUBLIC WORSHIP, CONTINUED.

COMMUNION CELEBRATED EVERY LORD'S DAY—AFTERWARDS DAILY—FREE-WILL OFFERINGS—MANNER OF CELEBRATION—SENT TO THE ABSENT—GIVEN TO INFANTS—CELEBRATED IN PRIVATE HOUSES EVERY MORNING, OR WITH STRANGERS—CLASSES OF CATECHUMENS—MYSTERIES—BAPTISM ADMINISTERED AT FIRST IN ANY PLACE—AFTERWARDS IN CHURCH—GENERALLY BY IMMERSION—CLINICK BAPTISM—DEFERRED OFTEN TILL DEATH—REASON OF THIS—HORROR FELT FROM WANTING IT DURING A STORM—STORY OF NAZIANZEN—IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO THE PERSON BY WHOM, AND THE PLACE IN WHICH, IT WAS DISPENSED—ANNUAL SEASONS FOR BAPTIZING—CEREMONIES ATTENDING IT—ANECDOTE OF AN AFRICAN SLAVE—PUBLIC CONFESSION OF FAITH—WHITE GARMENTS—CHANGE OF NAME.

THE service of communion has, in all periods of the Christian Church, been regarded as the most solemn act of devotion, and the primitive age was so far from being an exception, that the Christians of that time showed the profound reverence they entertained for the last institution of the Saviour, by circumstances more varied, perhaps, than their successors have ever done. The anxious provision they made, that the holy mysteries should never be witnessed by profane eyes,—the elaborate and well-tried course of preparation, through which all had to pass, ere they were deemed qualified to participate in the highest solemnity of their faith, as well as the imposing formalities with which they accompanied the observance of the sacred rite,—show the high estimation in which they held it. A description of these will

form the subject of the present chapter, previous to which, however, we shall premise a few observations on the time at which the Lord's Supper was celebrated among the primitive Christians, as well as on the frequency of its celebration. At first, from a pious, though not, perhaps, an enlightened, regard to the example of Christ, they studiously endeavoured that their celebration of the ordinance should embrace all the circumstances which had marked its original appointment; and as they usually met, like Christ and his disciples on that memorable occasion, in an upper room, they thought it their duty to follow them in point of time as well as of place, by postponing it till night, and making it a sequel to the ordinary meal of which they partook at the close of the day. the testimonies of many ancient authors, it appears that this was the period of its observance in the times immediately succeeding the apostles; and where the love-feast that preceded was characterised by a spirit of Christian temperance and concord, there could not have been a more appropriate and seasonable occasion than a social supper, for observing a solemnity which was peculiarly a feast of communion and love. But in the course of time these amiable festivals not unfrequently exhibited scenes of irregularity and excess, little in accordance with the sacredness of the religious rite that followed; and accordingly, the Christians of that day, from a unanimous feeling of the propriety of a change, transferred it to the morning—the only time when, in the primitive age, the public assemblies for worship could often be held.*

In these assemblies the communion formed a neverfailing part of the service; for, without entering on the question, how often the apostles and their contemporaries observed the holy rite, † there is no doubt that

^{*} Neander, p. 380.

[&]quot;No inference can be drawn," says Dr Dick very justly, "from Acts xi. other than that the Lord's Supper was one of the evangelical institutions which the disciples were stedfast in observing. The chief argument for

the primitive Christians early adopted the practice of celebrating it every time that they met for public worship. The Lord's day insured its weekly observance, the festivals afforded other opportunities of frequent recurrence, and the introduction of the antelucan meetings gave birth to the custom of communicating every day. Nor did this daily familiarity with an ordinance, in which the sublimest mysteries are exhibited to the eye of sense, impair their reverence for it as the highest solemnity of their religion, or deprive it of its efficacy as a means of comfort, and an incentive to holiness. Habitually conversant with the great objects of faith, and making it their daily aim and endeavour to infuse the spirit of Christianity into all the transactions and scenes of their every-day life, they required no other preparation than their ordinary practices to attune their minds to that act of more than wonted devotion; and looking upon it as an explicit testimony of their attachment to Christ, and a public avowal that they gloried in his cross-though it was the most ignominious part of his history—they felt that they could not too frequently observe the memorials of his death. Besides, assailed as they were on every side by contumely and oppression in a thousand forms, and sensible of their need of some extraordinary means of fortifying their faith and animating their mutual love, they found themselves borne onwards, by the necessities of their outward condition, to the daily celebration of a rite, which experience taught them was so conducive to their edification, and by which, every morning, before mingling with the world, they renewed their oath of fealty to their Divine Master, and of union with each other. So long as the vivid impressions of faith and love, that characterised the first age, remained the distinguishing trait of Chris-

the weekly celebration of it is drawn from Acts xx. 7. I acknowledge," he continues, "that this verse implies, that it was the main purpose of their meeting on that occasion; but for this very reason, I conclude that it was not the usual design of coming together."

tians, these frequent and daily acts of communion were at once the channel through which their habitual feelings sought vent, and the source that fed anew the streams of their spiritual affections. But in the altered circumstances of the following age, when the religion of Jesus ceased to be an object of persecution, and multitudes connected themselves with his visible Church, far inferior in piety and zeal to their predecessors, the practice of daily communion fell into desuetude. At first, it was considered sufficient to observe the rite three or four times a-week, then only on the Lord's day, till, at last, they contented themselves with renewing the solemnity as seldom as three or four times

a-year.*

But however much they altered in different places, and at different periods, the times of celebrating this sacred ordinance, they never varied, except, perhaps, in some trifling circumstances, in the mode of observance. The peculiar service of the faithful was commonly introduced by a private and silent prayer, which was followed by a general supplication for the Church and the whole family of mankind, and then each of the brethren came forward to contribute a free-will offering, according to his ability, to the treasury of the church,—the wealthy always being careful to bring part of theirs in articles of bread and wine. Out of this collection, both the sacramental elements were furnished,—the one consisting, from the first, of the common bread that was in use in the country, and the other of wine diluted with water, according to the universal practice of the ancients. Preliminary to the distribution of these, two eeremonies were always observed with the greatest punctuality,—the one emblematical of the purity that became the ordinance, the other of the love that should reign among all the disciples of Christ. The deacons brought a basin of water, in which the presiding ministers washed their hands in

^{*} King's Prim. Church, part ii. chap. vi.

presence, and on behalf, of the whole congregation,a practice founded on the words of the Psalmist,—" I will wash my hands in innocence, and so I will compass thine altar;" and then, on a given signal, the assembled brethren, in token of their mutual amity and good-will, proceeded to give each other a holy kiss, ministers saluting ministers, the men their fellowmen, and the women the female disciples that stood beside them. At this stage of the service, another prayer of a general nature was offered, at the conclusion of which the minister, addressing the people, said, "Peace be unto you," to which they responded in one voice, "and with thy spirit." Pausing a little, he said, "Lift up your hearts to God," to which they replied, "We lift them up unto God;" and then, after another brief interval of silence, he proceeded, "Let us give thanks to God," to which they returned the ready answer, "It is meet and just so to do." These preliminary exhortations being completed, the minister offered up what was called the great thanksgiving for all blessings, both temporal and spiritual, especially for the unspeakable love of God as manifested in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and for that holy ordinance in which, in gracious adaptation to the nature of man, He is evidently set forth as crucified and slain; concluding with an earnest desire, that intending communicants might participate in all the benefits it was designed to impart, to which all the people said aloud, "Amen." As the communicants were about to advance to the place appropriated for communion,—for up to that time it was unoccupied,—the minister exclaimed, "Holy things to holy persons,"-a form of expression equivalent to a practical prohibition of all who were unholy; and the invitation to communicants was given by the singing of some appropriate Psalms, such as the passage in the 34th, "" O taste and see that God is good," and the 133d, beginning, "Behold! how good and how

pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" The elements having been consecrated by a prayer, which consisted ehiefly of the words of the institution, the minister took up the bread, and breaking it, in memorial of Christ's body being broken, distributed it to his assisting brethren beside him, and in like manner the cup, both of which were earried round by the deacons to the communicants in order; and while they presented them in this simple form, "the body of Christ," "the blood of Christ," each communicant, on receiving them, devoutly said, "Amen." The manner in which they received the element, was by taking it in the right hand, and placing their left underneath to prevent any of it from falling. The act of communion being finished, a thanksgiving hymn was sung, and an appropriate prayer offered, after which the brethren again gave each other the salutation of a holy kiss, and having received the blessing of their pastor, were exhorted to "Go in peace." *

Such was the manner in which the holy rite of the Supper was usually celebrated among the primitive Christians. But we shall have exhibited a very imperfect view of their manners in this respect, unless we take into consideration some peculiarities, which, while they were professedly founded on a literal interpretation of the words of Scripture, gave rise to customs that have been almost universally exploded by every succeeding age of the Church. According to their ideas, the feast of communion, implying a fellowship in spirit and feeling, might be celebrated by persons who were absent, as well as those who were present at the solemnity; and accordingly, they were in the habit of sending, by the hands of the deacons, portions of the sacred elements to their brethren, who, from sickness or imprisonment, were unable to attend. Such causes of absence as these, which arose from the unavoidable dispensations of Providence, ought not,

^{*} Cave's Prim. Christ., part i. chap. xi.; Bingham, vol. iii. p. 286.

in their opinion, to deprive any of the comfort and privilege of communicating; and as numbers of those who were ranked in this class, were martyrs, confessors of the truth, and devoted followers of the Saviour, they considered it would have been the height of cruelty to withhold from such honoured characters the means of participating with their brethren in an act of communion that was essentially spiritual. Frequently did they transmit, therefore, to the sick-beds or the dungeons of their brethren, fragments of the bread that had been consecrated in the church; or, where that could not be procured, the minister consecrated it on the spot; -nay, so far were they carried by their benevolent desire to extend the benefits of this sacred ordinance to all who were anxious to partake of it, that they scrupled not to send it to penitents when in a dying state, though persons undergoing discipline would not, in other circumstances, have been deemed qualified, according to the established rules of the Church. memorable example of this is furnished in the case of Serapion, a Christian of whose faith and sincerity no doubt was entertained, till, on the outbreak of a violent persecution, he fell from his profession. Returning to his first love, he long and importunately solicited in vain a restoration to the privilege of communion. Being overtaken, at length, by a severe indisposition, which brought him in four days to the verge of the grave, he despatched a messenger to one of the neighbouring ministers, with an earnest request that he would come and give him the consolations of the sacrament. The minister was prevented by sickness from going in person, but perceiving the urgency of the case, he sent a portion of the consecrated bread by the hands of the messenger, who administered it to the dying penitent.

Another peculiarity of theirs—arising from an impression of the absolute necessity of this ordinance to salvation—was their admission of persons to partake

of it of all ages, and in every variety of circumstance. Provided only that they had received the initiatory rite of baptism, the primitive Christians scrupled not to administer the other Christian sacrament to all, without exception, even though they might be altogether unconscious of the service in which they were made to engage. Hence the custom of giving the communion to infants—a custom which, for many ages, prevailed in the ancient church; and as persons of that tender age were unable to eat the bread, the practice early came into use of dipping it in wine, and pressing a drop or two from the moistened sop into the mouth of the babe. Hence, also, the custom of administering it to the sick in the delirium of a fever, or in such circumstances of bodily weakness that they were incapable of communicating their own wishes, -which, however, if the attendant nurse testified had been previously and anxiously expressed, were gratified by a participation of the sacred rite, just as if they had been in the full possession of bodily and mental health. Hence, also, the custom of many religious persons carrying home a portion of the consecrated bread from the church to their own homes, and reserving it for future use among their most precious and valuable treasures. In a chest appropriated to the purpose, this sacred deposit was laid, and when no opportunity was afforded of attending the morning service, every time they rose from bed, and before engaging in any worldly business, they were accustomed to consecrate the day by the solemn act of participating of the sacrament; or, when a Christian stranger came to their houses for their hospitality, ere ever he tasted of the viands that were produced for his refreshment, the morsel of the consecrated bread was broken between them, and their social intercourse hallowed by the preliminary rite of communion. Customs like these, which savoured so strongly of superstition, could have originated only in a profound feeling of reverence for the ordinance,

and in an impression of its supposed indispensable necessity to the wellbeing of the soul in a future world; and accordingly, we find, from the testimony of many ancient writers, that they were founded on a literal interpretation of these words of our Lord,—"Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." Happy had it been, if men had looked less to the sign than to the thing signified, and had been more disposed to direct the eye of faith to the meritorious death of the Redeemer, than to behold with their eyes, and handle with their hands, and taste with their mouths, the

symbols that were exhibited to the senses.

While those who were entitled to partake of the Lord's Supper were exclusively denominated the faithful, and considered as occupying the rank of perfect or approved Christians, there were several other classes of persons, who, though connected with the Church, and forming constituent parts of it, were yet separated from, and inferior to, the former, being in various stages of advancement towards a qualification for the holy rites of the Gospel. These orders, known by the name of catechumens, were distinguished from each other by lines of demarcation, beyond which none was allowed to pass without a long and gradual preparation; and between a new made catechumen, and a Christian in the rank of the faithful, there was as wide a difference in the eye of the primitive Church, as between an infant of a day, and one who has attained the stature of a full-grown man. In the records of apostolic times, we shall in vain look for any traces of this distinction,—for then a heathen no sooner made an avowal of his faith in Christ, than he received the initiatory rite of Christianity. His conversion was immediately followed by his baptism; and whatever shades of difference there might be in the knowledge and the faith of the new converts, all were considered as equally entitled to the outward sign, as they were

to the inward and spiritual benefits of the ordinance. But in process of time, when the Church was enlarged by a daily increasing influx of members from heathenism, and when her purity was no longer guarded by the presiding care of those who possessed the miraculous gift of discerning spirits, the pious solicitude of her rulers in after-times gave rise to the custom of deferring the admission of converts into the fellowship of the Church, till clear and satisfactory evidence was obtained of their fitness, in point both of knowledge and sincerity, to be enrolled in the ranks of the disciples. The dear-bought experience of the primitive Christians had convinced them that the gross habits of idolaters were not easily, and all at once, in many instances, relinquished for the pure and spiritual principles of the Gospel, and that multitudes of professed believers held their faith by so slender a tie, that the slightest temptation plunged them anew into their former sensuality, and the first alarm drove them back into the enemy's camp. To diminish, and, if possible, to prevent the occurrence of such melancholy apostasies, which interrupted the peace and prosperity of the Christian society, and brought a stain on the Christian name, was a consummation devoutly wished for by the pious fathers of the primitive age; and, accordingly, animated by a spirit of holy jealousy, they adopted the rule, which soon came into universal practice, of instituting a severe and protracted inquiry into the character and views of candidates for admission to the communion of the Church,—of not suddenly advancing them to that honourable degree, but of continuing them for a limited period in a state of probation.* It was thus that the order of the catechumens arose, -an order which, though unknown to the age of Peter and Paul, boasts of a very early introduction into the primitive Church; and at whatever period its date may be fixed, its origin is to be traced to the laudable

^{*} Ryan's Effects of Religion on Mankind, p. 274.

desire of more fully instructing young converts in the doctrines of the Christian faith, and at the same time affording them opportunities to give evidence of the sincerity of their profession, by the change of their lives and the holiness of their conversation.*

The children of Christian parents, being already baptized in their infancy, were admitted to the rank of catechumens, as soon as they were susceptible of religious instruction. But as a great proportion of the candidates for admission to the Church, consisted in the primitive ages of converts from heathenism, that order was generally composed of persons of mature years, and the manner in which they were entered on its lists was as follows:—The moment that a heathen announced his resolution to abandon the religion of his fathers, and to embrace that of Jesus, he was introduced to the pastor of the place, who, having laid his hand upon his head, a ceremony of very frequent use in all the offices of the ancient Church, and prayed that he might become a partaker of the grace of the Gospel, consigned him to the care of some missionaries, whose duty it was, from time to time, to wait upon him privately, and in his own house, to instruct him in the elementary principles of the Christian faith. † At an appointed time, and when he had satisfied his private instructors of his capacity to profit by the services of the Church, he was permitted to come into the congregation, where he stood in a particular place appropriated to the hearers—those who were admitted to hear the Scriptures read, and the plain and simple discourses on the fundamental articles of faith and points of duty, which always formed the subject of the preliminary exhortations of the Church. proficiency and conduct of the catechumen during his continuance in this lower rank were approved of, he was, at a certain period, advanced to a higher order,

^{*} King's Prim. Church, part ii. chap. iii.; Bingham, vol. iv. chap. ii. † Bingham, vol. ii. p. 54.

which was privileged not only to be present at the reading of the Scriptures, and the delivery of the sermons, but also at the prayers, which we described as concluding the first service. After remaining the appointed time in this more advanced stage of his progress, he was successively privileged to be present at the public prayers of the Church, to hear the discourses addressed to the faithful on the higher and more abstruse doctrines of Christianity, and even to witness, at a humble distance, the dispensation of the Lord's Supper.* He was then considered ripe for baptism, and immediately put on a new course of discipline, preparatory to partaking of the holy mysteries at the next celebration of the solemnity. Hitherto he had been trained, by a regular course of catechetical instructions in private, to a knowledge of the leading doctrines and duties of the Gospel, and now he was subjected to frequent and minute examinations in public on every branch of his religious education. If approved, he was forthwith instructed in some of the sublimer points of Christianity, which had been hitherto withheld from him,—such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, the influences of the Spirit, and the way in which a participation of the symbols of the Saviour's love gives spiritual nourishment to the soul. He was allowed to employ the Lord's prayer,—the use of which was considered as the exclusive privilege of his adopted children; and was enjoined to commit to memory the creed, as a formula which embodied, in a small compass, all the grand articles of revealed truth, which it had been the object of his protracted discipline to teach him. For twenty successive days he continued a course of partial fasting, during which he had daily interviews with his minister, who, in private, and secluded from the presence of every other observer, endeavoured, by serious discourse, to impress his mind

^{*} Mosheim de rebus Christ., pp. 305, 320.

with a sense of the important step he was about to take,—and more especially, prayed with him, in the usual solemn form, by imposition of hands, that he might be delivered from any evil spirit that had possession of his heart, and be enabled to consecrate himself a living sacrifice to God and the Saviour. Such was the discipline of the catechumens,—a discipline to which all ranks and descriptions of men, who were desirous of being admitted into the bosom of the Church, were in primitive times indiscriminately sub-"None," to use the words of Lord King, "were permitted to enjoy the privileges of the faithful, till they had in a manner merited them,—which was, when they had, through a considerable time of trial, manifested the sincerity of their hearts by the sanctity and purity of their lives. When they had changed their manners, and rectified their former habits, then they were washed with the waters of baptism, and not before."

The period during which they continued this course of preparation varied in different places, and was, indeed, often regulated by no other rule than the proficiency of the candidates. In general, it lasted for two or three years; though, in cases of severe indisposition and imminent dauger, the probation was shortened, and the most benevolent and anxious provision made to dispense to the sick or dying catechumens, whose life was consistent with their views, though they had not completed their appointed time of discipline, all the comforts which a participation in the privileges of the Church could give.* But when no such pressing emergency occurred, the young disciple was left to accomplish his noviciate in the ordinary course; and it was only by slow and progressive steps he ascended to the standard of knowledge and virtue that gave him a passport to the region of the faithful. During the whole of that initiatory process, the sacred

mysteries were kept an inviolable secret, - were as studiously concealed from the knowledge of the catechumens as from the profane eyes of unbelieving Jews and heathens. Not only were persons of that order not permitted to be present at the celebration of the holy rite; but—to tell them the manner in which it was administered, to mention the words used in the solemnity, or to describe the simple elements of which it consisted, were themes the initiated were as strictly forbidden to touch upon, as if they had been laid under an oath of secresy. Not a hint was allowed to be given, nor a whisper breathed on the subject, till the catechumens had arrived at that stage of advancement when it was considered safe and beneficial to reveal it. Even the ministers, whenever they were led, in their public discourses, to speak of the sacraments, or the higher doctrines of faith, contented themselves with remote allusions, or with this phraseology,—The faithful know what is meant; nor did they ever write about them, except through the medium of figurative and enigmatical expressions, for fear of giving that which is holy unto dogs, or casting pearls before swine.* This veil of mystery, which the discipline of the primitive Church so carefully drew around her solemn ordinances and higher doctrines, was framed with a well-meant adaptation to the habits of the heathen, who, familiar, from their earliest years, with rites shrouded in impenetrable and mysterious darkness, might have stumbled, it was feared, at the threshold of a religion from which all sensible mysteries were entirely banished; and who, accustomed to the imposing ceremonies that lent their charm to the ritual of heathen temples, might have turned with contempt from a worship where there was no altar, and no greater solemnity than the dispensation of common bread and wine. By keeping these in temporary concealment, it was thought that curiosity would be excited, and young

^{*} Mosheim de rebus Christ., p. 526.

disciples kept on the tiptoe of expectation and desire, till, being duly instructed in the principles and the spirit of Christianity, they would be gradually weaned from the gross and sensual ideas they had been taught to associate with religion, and be prepared to appreciate the few and simple rites which the Divine Author of the Gospel had appointed. Part of this discipline was doubtless dictated by the true spirit of Christian wisdom. It was most proper and necessary, and advantageous both to the interests of religion and to the comfort and spiritual wellbeing of the converts themselves, that a course of preparatory instructions should be prescribed, which would fit them for becoming enlightened and steady members of the Church, and for duly profiting by its appointed ordinances; but to shut up the sacred rites of Christianity from the knowledge of all who did not participate in them, betrayed a spirit foreign to that of the Gospel, and akin to the policy which originated the mysteries of Eleusis. It was no doubt resorted to as a measure of expediency, in the peculiar circumstances and state of the primitive Church; nor should we lightly pass the sentence of censure or condemnation on a discipline which originated in a truly pious age, and the manifest tendency of which was to create a high veneration for the ordinances of the Gospel. But it was a departure from the simple practice of the apostles and their contemporaries, and it was the occasion of opening, at no distant period, the flood-gates of the grossest superstition.

Baptism, the rite with which an approved course of discipline was crowned, was regarded by the primitive Christians with sentiments of extraordinary reverence. Independently of the sacred interest that was attached to it, as an ordinance of the Saviour, instituted among the last words he spoke on earth, and associated with the promise of his gracious presence and blessing to the end of the world;—indepen-

dently, too, of the invaluable spiritual blessings of which it was the sign, and which, no doubt, were the primary causes of all the value set upon it, it acquired an adventitious importance of no ordinary kind in the eves of men, who could not arrive at it but by a course of laborious and prolonged preparation, -into whose minds the sentiment was instilled from day to day, that baptism would sever them from the world, and seal their union to Christ as their spiritual master; and whose desires to attain that distinguished honour were for two or three years before wound up to a pitch of the highest excitement. Previously to their reception of this initiatory rite, they were scarcely recognised as in the ranks of Christians. They were regarded, indeed, as standing a step higher than Jews or heathers, but still occupying the lowest grade in the Church, were treated by the faithful with the condescending sympathy and tenderness shown by superiors to those beneath them, -not with the kiss of peace, and the overflowings of affection bestowed upon the brethren, -and spoken of by names, implying that they were as yet in a state of non-existence in regard to the profession of Christianity. The ceremony that ushered them into Christian society, naturally drew to itself, in these circumstances, all the interest of an event. that constituted an era in their religious history; and not more ardently does the minor long for the period that will raise him to the dignity of manhood, and give him the free and uncontrolled disposal of his affairs; not more impatiently does the apprentice anticipate the term which will emancipate him from the shackles of servitude, and announce him to the world as master of his art,—than the catechumen looked forward to baptism as the period of his attaining the dignity of a follower of Christ,—as the passage from the threshold to the interior of the Church,—the passport to the privileged ranks of the faithful,—the

badge by which he was stamped as an illuminated,

approved, and perfect Christian.*

This ordinance was dispensed at all times, in private and in public, by night and by day. The moment that a catechumen had satisfactorily completed his appointed probation, he might claim the administration of baptism, and the zeal of the primitive age was always so ready to give encouragement to the young convert, that his pastor would have complied with his wishes by admitting him to the holy rite, at whatever period his noviciate was ended. But as a large proportion of the candidates for baptism were adults, persons of mature years, who came from the ranks of heathenism to join the Christian society,—and as great numbers were always passing through their appointed trials at the same time, it became customary to introduce these into the church in a body; and hence two or three periods in the year, such as the days that preceded the celebration of any of the great festivals, were selected as the most convenient for baptizing them.† The place where the rite was performed was long as unsettled and fluctuating as the time,—the ordinance being administered indifferently, in a house or a prison—by a river side, or the sea shore,—in salt water, or in fresh, according to the convenience or situation of the party. But in after-times, when the form of Christian worship was duly established, it was usual to administer the ordinance in a baptistery or font, belonging to the church, situated at first in the porch, as emblematical of the rite being the entrance into the society of the faithful; but afterwards fenced in the body of the church itself. It was a spacious receptacle, contrived as well for the accommodation of

^{*} Persons baptized were said to be illuminated, from their being then enlightened in a knowledge of the mysteries previously concealed from them,—to be approved and perfect, as having passed through the state of the catechumens with approbation.
† Cave's Primitive Christianity, part i. chap. x.; King's Primitive Church, part ii. chap. v.

several persons at a time, which the number of the candidates often made necessary, as adapted to the mode of baptizing then generally adopted. In situations where there was a scarcity of water, or in cases of sickness and imminent danger, the ordinance was administered by sprinkling,—and this being in the latter circumstances generally performed at the bedside of the convert, received the name of clinick baptism,—a form which, however necessary it was considered, was yet looked upon as imperfect, and as interposing an obstacle to the future advancement of the person so baptized to any of the offices of the ministry. With the exception of such cases, however, the mode which seems to have been most prevalent was by immersion; and, while, from the greatest number of the primitive Christians being natives of the warm climates of the East, it was most suited to their habits to plunge the whole body under water, it was thought that this practice more fully answered to the idea of being buried with Christ in baptism; and their coming out of the element, to that of rising with him to newness of life. The wooden structure in which it was performed, was divided by a partition wall, for the orderly and decent accommodation of the persons about to be baptized. The men were waited upon by deacons, the women by deaconesses; and the ceremony was gone through always in presence of the assembled congregation, from which, however, they were separated by the little tenement appropriated for the action.

From the peculiar notions entertained of the virtues of baptism, there gradually arose several superstitious customs, one of the most prevalent of which was that of postponing the reception of the rite till an indefinite period after the catechumenship had terminated. In the beginning of the third century, the spirit of the age, which was peculiarly prone to multiply observances, and to cherish a reverence for times and

seasons, prompted many even of the greatest and most pious men of the time, to defer their baptism till the close of life. Witness the well-known cases of Constantine and Constantius, both of whom, though they had long made a public profession of Christianity, remained unbaptized till they were on their death-beds, —and the not less notorious example of Theodosius, who, though all his lifetime sustaining an eminent character for piety, did not apply for baptism till he was overtaken by a dangerous illness, from which, however, he afterwards recovered.* The reason of this delay of baptism was, that the ordinance, being thought of the greatest efficacy in cleansing the whole man, and removing all the stains and defilements of sin, it was supposed that the recipients, when baptized immediately before death, would enter into heaven in greater purity; and also, because a tedious and troublesome course of discipline was imposed on all who did not walk up to their baptismal engagements, or who, after receiving the rite, contracted foul impurities, and returned to their former habits of vice. Persons, however, who entertained such notions of the efficacy of baptism, and of its indispensable necessity to salvation, would not always find themselves in a condition to enjoy the comforts of the ordinance; and circumstances frequently occurred, which, depriving them of the means and opportunity of obtaining it, led them to sigh, with bitter but unavailing regret, over the custom that occasioned its postponement. The history of Gregory Nazianzen affords a remarkable case in illustration of this. Having received from his earliest years a pious, as well as a liberal education, he was a zealous Christian from the time he arrived at maturity, and was fit for entering the world. complete his classical studies, he was sent, according to the custom of his age, to Athens; and during his

^{*} Cave's Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. pp. 26 and 496. † Bingham, vol. ii. p. 132.

voyage to that celebrated seat of learning and science, he was overtaken by a storm, which threatened to consign the ship, and all who were on board, to a watery grave. While the rest of the passengers were giving themselves up for lost, and were bitterly bewailing the sad and untimely fate that apparently awaited them, Gregory was engrossed with reflections of another and more serious description. The apprehension of death and another world had summoned him to review his past life, and nothing so pained him as the thought of his being unbaptized, and thereby unentitled to the privileges of the Christian life. This reflection, brought home to him by the circumstances in the most vivid and alarming manner, wrung from him the most passionate exclamations of sorrow; he tore his clothes-threw himself on the floor-uttered such loud and piercing cries, that the very sailors, laying aside the sense of the common danger, came and sat beside him, weeping from sympathy. Recollecting himself, he addressed his prayers to heaven, pleading before God that he was his by private dedication in his early years, and that now, a second time, he devoted himself to God, which he would assuredly confirm by a public baptism, the moment he arrived on land, were it the Divine will to deliver him.*

Scarcely less importance was attached to the person by whom, and the place at which, the ordinance was administered. Some would not be baptized except by some pastor eminent for his orthodoxy and piety, and were content to wait till they had an opportunity of receiving it from the hands of their favourite idol, —as Augustine used to boast, that he had been admitted to baptism by the celebrated Ambrose.† Some fancied, that to be plunged in the stream whose waters were poured over the sacred person of the Redeemer, was alone sufficient to the purifying of the flesh,—as

^{*} Cave's Life of Gregory, p. 275. † Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. p. 393.

Constantine, who was on his progress to the Jordan for that purpose, when his journey was arrested by death. Others considered it their duty to delay baptism till they attained thirty years of age, the period at which Christ was baptized,—as Eusebius was not baptized when elected Bishop of Cesarea, and Perpetua till she was thrown into prison, a little before her martyrdom.* While another class selected one of the annual festivals, as the fittest season for their baptism -Epiphany, as the time when Christ was baptized, -or Easter, that they might die with him, -or Whitsuntide, that they might celebrate with due honour the descent of the Holy Ghost. All these customs originated either in the fancy and caprice of individuals, or in a superstitious attachment to times, places and persons,—when Christians had begun to rest the efficacy and virtue of the ordinance less on the thing signified, than on the outward circumstances with which the celebration was associated.

The rite of baptism was originally administered in a very simple manner—the apostles and their contemporaries contenting themselves with an appropriate prayer, and the subsequent application of the element of water. At an early period, however, a variety of ceremonies was introduced, with the pious, though mistaken view, of conveying a deeper and more solemn impression of the ordinance, and affording, by each of them, a sensible representation of the grand truths and spiritual blessings of which it is significant. The baptismal season having arrived, those catechumens who were ripe for baptism, and who were then called competentes, or elect, were brought to the baptistery, at the entrance of which they stopped, and then mounting an elevated platform, where they could be seen and heard by the whole congregation of the faithful, each, with an audible voice, renounced the devil and all his works. The manner in which he did

^{*} Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. p. 224.

this, was by standing with his face towards the west, and with some bodily gesture, expressive of the greatest abhorrence, declaring his resolution to abandon the service of Satan, and all the sinful works and pleasures of which he is the patron and the author. This renunciation being thrice repeated, the candidate elect turned towards the east—the region of natural light, and therefore fit emblem of the Sun of Righteousness, -made three times a solemn promise and engagement to become the servant of Christ, and submit to all his After this, he repeated the Creed deliberately, clause by clause, in answer to appropriate questions of the minister, as the profession of his faith. deemed an indispensable part of the ceremony, that this confession should be made audibly, and before many witnesses; and in those rare and unfortunate instances, where the applicants for baptism possessed not the power of oral communication, this duty was performed through the kind offices of a friend, who, testifying their desire to receive the ordinance, acted as their substitute. In ancient history, an anecdote is told of an African negro slave, who, after having passed satisfactorily through the state of catechumen, and been entered on the lists for baptism, suddenly fell into a violent fever, which deprived him of the faculty of speech. Having recovered his health, but not the use of his tongue, on the approach of the baptismal season, his master bore public testimony to his principles, and the Christian consistency of his conduct, in consequence of which he was baptized, along with the class of catechumens to which he belonged. The profession of faith being ended, and a prayer being offered, that as much of the element of water as should be employed might be sanctified, and that all who were about to be baptized might receive, along with the outward sign, the inward invisible grace, the minister breathed on them, symbolically conveying to them the influences of the Holy Spirit,—an act which, in later

times, was followed by anointing them with oil, to indicate that they were ready, like the wrestlers in the ancient games, to fight the fight of faith.* The preliminary ceremonies were brought to a close by his tracing on the foreheads of all the sign of the cross, an observance which, as we formerly remarked, was frequently used on the most common as well as sacred occasions by the primitive Christians,—and to which they attached a purely Christian meaning, that of living by faith on the Son of God. All things being prepared, and the person about to be baptized having stripped off his garments, the minister took each by the hand, and plunged him thrice under the water, pronouncing each time the name of the three persons in the Godhead. The newly baptized having come out of the water, was immediately dressed by some attendants in a pure white garment, which signified, that having put off his old corrupt nature, and his former bad principles and practices, he had become a new man. A very remarkable example of this ceremony occurs in the history of the celebrated Chrysos-The conspirators who had combined to ruin that great and good man in Constantinople, resolved on striking the first blow on the eve of an annual festival, at the hour when they knew he would be alone in his vestry, preparing for his duty to the candidates for baptism. By mistake, they did not arrive till he had begun the service in the church. Heated with wine, and goaded on by their malignant passions, they burst into the midst of the assembly, most of whom were young persons, in the act of making the usual profession of their faith, and some of whom had already entered the waters of the baptistery. The whole congregation were struck with consternation. The catechumens fled away naked and wounded to the neighbouring woods, fields, or any places that

^{*} Jortin says that oil was not used till the days of Justin.—Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, vol. ii. p. 37.

promised them shelter from the massacre that was perpetrating in the city. And next morning, as soon as it had dawned, an immense meadow was seen covered all over with white, -on examining which, it was found to be filled with catechumens who had been baptized the night before, and who were then, according to custom, dressed in their white garments, amounting in number to three thousand.* Those white garments, after being worn a week, were thrown aside, and deposited in the antechamber of the church, where, with the name of the owner inscribed on each, they were carefully preserved as memorials of baptism, ready to be produced against them in the event of their violating its vows. A memorable instance of this use of them occurs in the history of the primitive age. A Carthagenian, who had long been connected with the Christian Church of his native city, at length apostatized, and joining the ranks of its enemies, became one of the most violent persecutors of all who named the name of Christ. Through the influence of friends, he was elevated to a high civil station, the powers of which he prostituted to the cruel and bloody purpose of persecuting his former friends. Among those who were dragged to his tribunal was a deacon, once an intimate friend of his own, and who had been present at his baptism. On being put to the rack, he produced the white garments of the apostate, and in words that went to the heart of all the bystanders, solemnly declared that these would testify against his unrighteousness at the last day.

Immediately after the baptism, the new-made members, in their snow-white dress, took their place among the body of the faithful, each of whom that was near welcomed them as brethren with the kiss of peace; and, as being admitted into the family of God, whose adopted children alone are entitled to address Him as "Our Father," they were permitted, for the first time,

^{*} Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. p. 496.

publicly to use the Lord's Prayer and to partake of the communion.

Besides, at this period, they generally assumed a new name. Many of the names in familiar use among the heathens being borrowed from those of the objects of their worship, the converts to Christianity deemed it becoming and consistent with their new principles, to change their family name for others that had been borne by some distinguished personage in the history of their faith, or that was significant of some virtue recommended by it. Hence we find many in the primitive ages bearing the name of prophets and apostles, and even of the Christian graces; such as, in Greek, Eusebius, Eustachius, Gregorý, Athanasius; and in Latin, Pius, Fidus, Speratius.* An example may be given from the interesting history of the Martyrs of Palestine. "When the governor," says the historian, "had made trial of their invincible fortitude by tortures in every form, he asked the chief person among them 'who he was,' and heard in answer, not a real or common name, but that of some one of the prophets. For it happened, that those men, having laid aside the name by which, as received by their parents, they were called, as being the appellations of idols, had assumed unto themselves other names; and one might have observed them using the names of Elias, or Jeremiah, Samuel, or Daniel; and thus showing themselves to be, not in deeds alone, but even in their very appellations, as 'that Jew who is such inwardly,' and as that Israel of God who is such really and in sincerity." †

^{*} Fleury's Mœurs des Chretiens, p. 148. † Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. iii. p. 63.

CHAPTER VI.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO DISCIPLINE.

SEVERITY OF DISCIPLINE—TENDERNESS AND SORROW FOR THE OFFENDER—
TREMENDOUS EFFECTS OF EXCOMMUNICATION—HUMILIATING POSTURES
AT THE GATE OF THE CHURCH—DURATION OF BANISHMENT FROM THE
CHURCH—SOLEMN MANNER OF RESTORING OFFENDERS—THE REASON
OF SO SEVERE AND PROTRACTED DISCIPLINE—IMPARTIALITY OF IT—
STORY OF THEODOSIUS.

WIDELY as society among the primitive Christians was pervaded with the leaven of a pure and exalted morality, and well adapted as were the means they took to preserve that high standard of piety and virtue. their history bears melancholy evidence, that no precautions are sufficient to protect the purest associations of men from the intrusion of the unworthy. Even in the earliest age of the Church, when the number of the disciples was small, and the apostles themselves presided over the interests of the infant body, the rules of Christian propriety were frequently violated, and the most odious forms of hypocrisy and vice were found lurking under the cloak of a religious profession; and it is not surprising, therefore, that as Christianity enlarged her boundaries, and saw multitudes flocking to her standard in every region of the world, the number of delinquents proportionally increased. some who had embraced the cause of Jesus from low and selfish considerations, and others who had brought over to the new religion a lingering attachment to the

habits of the old, were often found acting in a manner that disgraced the Christian name, or betrayed a spirit at variance with the requirements of the Gospel, a more numerous class were driven, through weakness, or the fears of persecution, to apostatize from the faith, and defile themselves again with the profane rites of idolatry; and no description of offenders-not even those who were guilty of the grossest immoralitiesappeared in the eyes of the primitive Church to have more degraded themselves, and to be covered with a darker shade of guilt, than those who, from a cowardly apprehension of torture and death, relapsed into the abominations of heathenism. From various causes, then, partly arising from the peculiar circumstances of the times, partly traceable to the general corruption of human nature, the primitive Christians were ever and anon distressed with the discovery of offences committed by some of their body against the name or the principles of Jesus; and accordingly, one branch of their manners that presents itself pre-eminently to our notice, throughout the whole of their history, is the mode of treatment they observed towards their erring or fallen brethren.

That treatment was characterised by a rigour and an impartiality to which the discipline of succeeding ages has seldom furnished a parallel; and indeed it is not wonderful, that they who adopted such extraordinary means to prevent the introduction of vicious or unworthy men into the church, should have been equally anxious for the stern and unsparing exclusion of all who were afterwards found wanting in the requisite qualities of faith and holiness. Whatever other faults the primitive Christians fell into at different periods, at no time did they lay themselves open to the imputation of laxity. On the contrary, so much did a severe and inflexible virtue regulate the terms of membership during the whole period within which they flourished, that no sin, whether of that scandal-

ous description that outrages every feeling of decency, or of that milder character that implies only an inconsistency with the spirit of the Gospel, was allowed to pass, without receiving a due measure of censure or condemnation. Each successive age, though it added in many other respects to the religious observances of the preceding, transmitted the ancient discipline of the church unimpaired to posterity, and endeavoured to preserve the Christian society as a sacred enclosure, within whose precincts nothing unclean or unholy was permitted to enter or continue. But however firm and vigorous the hand with which they wielded the reins of discipline, they always tempered the infliction with the affectionate spirit of Christian love, and combined unqualified detestation of the sin with lively pity and concern for the sinner. While, in executing that painful duty, they knew no man after the flesh,would have addressed the language of reproof,-or passed the sentence of a long exile from the community of the faithful on their dearest earthly friend, if he deserved it,-they mourned over the fall of an erring disciple as much as if they had been suffering a personal or family bereavement. The day on which such a doom was sealed, was a season of universal and bitter lamentation. The aged considered themselves as having lost a son or a daughter—the young, as having been severed from a brother or sister. one felt that a tie had been broken, and that an event had occurred which could be considered in no other light than as a dire and wide-spread calamity. Before, however, they allowed matters to reach that painful extremity, they never failed to resort to every means, in private, of reproving and admonishing the brother whom they saw to be in fault; and it was not till after they had tried all the arts of persuasion, and their repeated efforts had proved unavailing, that they brought the case under the notice of the Church, and subjected the offender to that severe and impartial

ordeal which few but the most daring and incorrigible had the hardihood to abide. It is scarcely possible for us, who live in a state of society so different, to conceive the tremendous effect of a sentence which cut off an obstinate offender from all connection with the church, and which, being solemnly pronounced in the name of God, seemed to anticipate the award of the judgment-day. Looking upon the fallen disciple from that moment as an enemy of Christ and a servant of the devil, the brethren avoided his presence as they would have fled from plague or pestilence. They were forbid to admit him to their house, to sit with him at table, or to render him any of the ordinary offices of life; and the man who should have been detected in his company, would have run the hazard of bringing his own character into suspicion, and of being thought a guilty partner of the other's sins.*

Few but those in whom long habits of secret wickedness had almost obliterated every religious feeling, could remain long undisturbed and tranquil in a state which, considered as forsaken by God as well as by man, was attended with such a tremendous load of present misery, and which imagination associated with the terrors of a dark and unknown futurity. The hearts even of the most hardened, if they bore up for a while, through their corrupt nature, and the love of their sinful practices, soon felt this unnatural boldness give way,—and becoming alive to all the wretchedness of an excommunicated state, the unhappy sinners, like persons standing on the brink of despair, placed themselves again at the gate of the church, and implored, in the most importunate and abject manner, to be delivered from a condition which was more dreadful than death itself. From day to day they repaired to the cloisters, or the roofless area of the church,—for no nearer were they allowed to approach it, -and there they stood,

^{*} Cave's Primitive Christianity, part iii. chap. v.; King's Primitive Church, part i. chap. viii.

in the most humble and penitent attitude, with downeast looks, and tears in their eyes, and smiting on their breasts; or threw themselves on the ground at the feet of the faithful, as they entered to worship, begging an interest in their sympathies and their prayers, -confessing their sins, and crying out that they were as salt which had lost its savour, fit only to be trodden under foot. For weeks and months they often continued in this grovelling state, receiving from the passengers nothing but the silent expressions of their pity. Not a word was spoken, in the way either of encouragement or exhortation; for during these humiliating stations at the gate, the offenders were considered rather as candidates for penance than as actually penitents. When at last they had waited a sufficient length of time in this state of affliction, and the silent observers of their conduct were satisfied that their outward demonstrations of sorrow proceeded from a humble and contrite spirit, the rulers of the church admitted them within the walls, and gave them the privilege of remaining to hear the reading of the Scriptures and the sermon. The appointed time for their continuance among the hearers being completed, they were advanced to the third order of penitents, whose privilege it was to wait until that part of the service when the prayers for particular classes were offered up, and to hear the petitions which the minister, with his hands on their heads, and themselves on their bended knees, addressed to God on their behalf, for his mercy to pardon and his grace to help them. In due time they were allowed to be present at the celebration of the communion, and the edifying services that accompanied it; after witnessing which, and offering, at the same time, satisfactory proofs of that godly sorrow which is unto salvation, the term of penance ended.

The duration of this unhappy banishment from the peace and communion of the church lasted for no fixed time, but was prolonged or shortened according to the nature of the crime, and the promising character of the offender. The ordinary term was from two to five years. But in some cases of gross and aggravated sin, the sentence of excommunication extended to ten, twenty, and thirty years; and even in some cases, though rarely, to the very close of life. During the whole progress of their probation, the penitents appeared in sackcloth and ashes: the men were obliged to cut off their hair, and the women to veil themselves, in token of sorrow. They were debarred from all the usual comforts and amusements of life, and obliged to observe frequent seasons of fasting,—an exercise which, in the ancient Church, especially among the Christians of the East, was deemed an indispensable concomitant of prayer. On the day appointed for their deliverance from this humiliating condition, they came into the church in a penitential garb of sackcloth, and with a trembling voice and copious tears, took their station on an elevated platform, where, in presence of the assembled congregation, they made a public confession of their sins, and throwing themselves down on the ground, they be sought them to forgive the scandal and reproach they had brought on the Christian name, and to give them the benefit and comfort of their intercessory prayers. The brethren, moved with the liveliest emotions at beholding one, to whom they had often given the kiss of peace, in so distressing a situation, fell on their knees along with him; and the minister, in the same attitude of prostration, laying his hands on the head of the penitent, supplicated, with solemn fervour, the Divine compassion on him, and then raising him, placed him in the ranks of the faithful at the table of communion.

This severe and protracted discipline, through which offenders, in the primitive Church, were required to pass,—though several outward ceremonies usually entered as elements into the observance,—was reckoned

essentially a discipline of the mind; and it was as different from the bodily mortification, in which the votaries of Papal Rome comprise the whole duty of penitents, as the life-giving spirit is from the sense-Two grand and important objects were contemplated in its appointment,—the one to check every sin in the bud, and prevent the contagion of an evil example; for so jealous were the good and holy Christians of primitive times, of the least dishonour being done to their heavenly Master, or the smallest reproach being east on his cause, that they lost no time in excluding from their society every one who refused compliance with the precepts of the Gospel, or was not adorned with the fruits of its genuine and consistent disciples;—the other was to afford penitents sufficient time to prove the sincerity of their sorrow, and to satisfy the Church of their well-founded claims to enjoy its clemency and be restored to its privileges. It was the more necessary to adopt those measures of precaution, that in the days of primitive Christianity, multitudes, who from the ranks of idolatry came over to Christianity, retained a strong predilection for their early indulgences and habits, and were the occasion, by their vices and their crimes, of doing injury to the cause they embraced, to an extent of which we can scarcely form any idea. Accordingly, those who, under the pressure of severe sickness, or in the immediate prospect of death, were absolved and admitted to peace and communion, were, in the event of their recovery, required to place themselves again in that stage of their discipline at which they had arrived when arrested by their indisposition, and to complete the course in due order, as if no interruption had occurred; while, on the other hand, the sins of some were considered as of so black a hue, and involving such enormous guilt, that a lifetime appearing far too short a time to enable them to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, they were doomed by a law, as unal-

terable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, to live and die under the ban of the Church. In regard to those cases where penitents, in the progress of their trial, relapsed into sin, they were degraded to a lower rank, and obliged to enter on the task of probation anew,-an obligation, however, which, in such circumstances, was at once a punishment and a favour granted to them as an act of grace, in the spirit of Christian tenderness,—disposed to forbear a little longer with their weakness. But when a person who had gone through the routine of penitential observances, and was restored to the privileges of full communion, repeated his crime, or was convicted of another, the opportunity of again placing himself in the order of penitents was inflexibly denied, and no importunities or tears on his part, -no influence nor intercession on that of others, could open the gates of the Church, which thenceforth were for ever shut against him.*

Nor was the discipline of the primitive Church less distinguished for its impartiality than its rigour. Never was it known that the shield of protection was thrown over the head of a relative or friend; never did a timid or time-serving policy lead its rulers to shrink from visiting with merited punishment the perpetrator of wickedness in high places. Let the offender be who or what he might,—whether old or young, a male member of the community, or one belonging to the gentler sex; whether invested with the sacred office, or moving in the humbler sphere of an ordinary brother; whether a poor mechanic, or a Christian prince,—all were equally amenable to the laws,—all were doomed indiscriminately to abide the consequences of violating them, -all required to submit to the same tedious and searching ordeal, as the indispensable terms of their restoration to Christian society. The following historical anecdote, out of

^{*} Neander, sect. xi., part xi.

many similar ones that might be adduced, affords so interesting and remarkable a proof, with how steady and equal a hand the reins of ancient discipline were wielded, that we are confident our readers will excuse its insertion. The Emperor Theodosius, who flourished about the year 370, was a prince whose character was adorned with many virtues, and who added to the other excellent qualities that distinguished him-a firm and sincere attachment to the Gospel of Christ. As the best of men, however, have their besetting sins and their inherent faults, Theodosius inherited the infirmity of a keen and impetuous temper, which, on several occasions, hurried him to the inconsiderate adoption of measures which he afterwards found cause bitterly to lament. The most memorable of these occasions was the affair of Thessalonica. In that city of Macedonia, some enactments of the emperor had given so great and universal dissatisfaction to the inhabitants, that they assembled in an uproar, threatening to set the imperial orders at defiance, and sufficiently indicating their determined spirit of resistance by an attack upon the garrison, which was signalized by the massacre of the commanding officer, and several of the soldiery. The intelligence of this untoward event so incensed Theodosius, that he forthwith issued his mandate for reducing the whole city to ashes; and the bloody edict would have been carried into prompt execution by the military, who participated in the feelings of their monarch, and breathed revenge for the loss of their slaughtered comrades, had not some Christian bishops, by their powerful and importunate intercession, prevailed on the emperor reluctantly to recall his orders. The prime minister, however, was implacable, and by his incessant representations to his imperial master, that so ill-timed clemency would produce the greatest detriment to the public service, and weaken the hands of government especially in the provinces, succeeded in inducing Theodosius to reissue

his command for exterminating the Thessalonians with fire and sword. Seldom have the annals of history been stained with so foul a deed of perfidy and baseness. Proclamation having been made, that on a set day the civil authorities would treat the populace to an exhibition of their favourite games, a vast concourse assembled, and the moment all eyes were rivetted to the spot, expecting the spectacle to commence, bands of soldiers rushed furiously from all quarters on the defenceless crowd, slaughtering all without distinction of age, sex, or condition. So dreadful was the massacre, that within three hours, 7000 people were stretched lifeless on the ground. Meanwhile a messenger had been posting night and day from the palace with a commission to stop the proceedings, the emperor having no sooner consented to the massacre than he relented; but the deputy did not arrive till the unfortunate Thessalonica had become a city of the dead, and Theodosius had to sustain, in the eyes of God and man, the guilt of such unparalleled cruelty. Not long after, circumstances occurred that rendered it necessary for the emperor to repair to Milan, when the celebrated Ambrose, bishop of the place, wrote him a letter, in which he severely reproached him for his base and horrible treatment of the Thessalonians. Nothing is known of the reception given to this letter, or of any farther correspondence that may have passed between them on the subject, till, on the Lord's day, the emperor proceeding to public worship, Ambrose met him at the gates of the church, and peremptorily refused to admit him. This proceeding of Ambrose, extraordinary as it may appear to us, could not have been surprising nor unexpected to his sovereign, who was well aware that the austere discipline of the times doomed offenders of every description to wait in the area or the porticoes of the church, and beg the forgiveness and the prayers of the faithful, ere they were permitted to reach the lowest station of penitents. Self-

love, however, or a secret pride in his exalted station, might perhaps have led Theodosius to hope that the ordinary severity of the Church would be relaxed in his favour,-more especially, as the act imputed to him as a crime was justified by many urgent considerations of State policy; and, under this delusion, he made for the church, never dreaming, it would seem, that whatever demur the minister of Christ might make, he would never have the boldness to arrest the progress of an emperor in presence of his courtiers, and of the whole congregation. But the fear of man was never known to have made Ambrose flinch from his duty; and, heedless of every consideration, but that of fidelity to the cause and the honour of his heavenly Master, he planted himself on the threshold of the church, and vowed, that neither bribes nor menaces would induce him to admit, into the temple of the God of peace, a royal criminal, red with the blood of thousands, who were his brethren,—all of them by the ties of a common nature, -many of them by the bonds of a common faith. Theodosius, thus suddenly put on his self-defence, took refuge in the history of David, who was also a sovereign; and who, though he had combined the guilt of adultery with that of murder, was vet pardoned and restored to favour by God himself, on the confession of his sins. "You have resembled David in his crime," replied the inflexible Ambrose, "resemble him also in his repentance." Self-convicted and abashed, the emperor abandoned all farther attempts; and, returning to his palace, during eight months continued in a state of excommunication from Christian fellowship, bearing all the ignominy, and stooping to all the humiliating acts required of those who underwent the discipline of the Church. As the first annual season of communion approached, the anxiety of the emperor to participate in the holy rite became extreme. Often, in the paroxysms of his grief, did he say to the counsellor, who had advised

the Draconic edict against the Thessalonians, "Servants and beggars have liberty to join in worship and communion, but to me the church doors, and consequently the gates of heaven, are closed; for so the Lord hath decreed, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." At length it was agreed between the prince and his favourite, that the latter should seek an interview with Ambrose, and endeavour to gain him over to employ a privilege of his order,—that of abridging, in certain circumstances, the period appointed for the duration of Church discipline. The eagerness of his royal master could not wait his return, and, meeting him on his way, he was greeted with the unwelcome intelligence, that the faithful bishop considered it a violation of his duty to remit any part of the just censures of the Church; and that nothing but submission to the shame and degradation of a public confession of his sins could accomplish the object which was dearest to the heart of the royal penitent. On an appointed day, accordingly, Theodosius appeared in the church of Milan, clothed in sackcloth; and, acknowledging the heinousness of his offence, the just sentence by which he forfeited the communion of the faithful, and the profound sorrow he now felt for having authorised so gross an outrage on the laws of heaven and the rights of humanity, was received, with the unanimous consent of the whole congregation, once more into the bosom of Christian society. Nothing can afford a better test of the simplicity and godly sincerity of the Christian emperor, than his readiness to assume, in presence of his people, an attitude so humiliating. How deep must have been his repentance towards God,—how strong his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, -and how many plausible reasons of personal honour and public expediency must he have had to encounter, ere he could bring himself, in face of a crowded assembly, to say, as he entered, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken

thou me according to thy word;" and ere he could throw himself prostrate on the ground, to implore the pardon of God and the forgiveness of his fellow-men! And if this extraordinary history affords an illustrious example of genuine repentance, it exhibits, in no less memorable a light, the strictness and impartiality of primitive discipline. What minister would have dared to impose,—what prince would have submitted to undergo, a course of public penitence, so humiliating and so painful, if it had not been the established practice of the Church to let no offenders escape with impunity.*

^{*} Cave's Life of Ambrose.

CHAPTER VII.

MANNERS IN REGARD TO THE DEAD.

DEATH OF CHRISTIANS CALLED THEIR BIRTH—INDIFFERENCE AND BARBARITY OF HEATHENS—BURIAL FIRST INTRODUCED BY THE CHRISTIANS
—IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO IT—MOTIVES THAT LED TO A RELIGIOUS
ATTENTION TO THE DEAD—ZEAL IN GIVING BURIAL TO MARTYRS—WHOSE
BODIES WERE RESCUED—BOUGHT—CARRIED TO DISTANT SEPULCHRES
—DESCRIPTION OF THE FUNERAL OBSEQUIES OF THE CHRISTIANS—USE
OF PERFUMES—WATCHING THE CORPSE—FUNERAL PROCESSION—SERVICE AT THE GRAVE—ANNIVERSARY OF DEATH OF PRIVATE CHRISTIANS
—AND OF MARTYRS—FESTIVALS—CEMETERIES—CONCLUSION.

In no respect did the families of the primitive Christians exhibit so great a contrast to those of their heathen neighbours, as when death invaded the domestic circle. It is scarcely possible, by any description, to convey an idea of the scenes that passed under the roof of the ancient pagans, when they found themselves in the house of mourning-the extraordinary transition from the silent and suppressed anxiety that watched the bed of the dying relative, to the loud and tumultuous lamentations that followed the announcement of his decease,—the beating of their breasts, the tearing of their hair, their frantic cries, and wild gesticulations, that seemed to betoken the agony of despair. unrestrained expressions of sorrow, not unnatural, perhaps, in those who looked upon death as the precursor of annihilation, were begun the moment that calamity occurred, and were renewed ever and anon, by the arts of mercenary mourners, till the period arrived for pronouncing "the last wild word, Farewell!"

But, in the houses of believers, death occasioned no such scenes of noisy and tumultuous grief. That event, which neither the reflections of reason nor the aids of philosophy could enable the votaries of idolatry to view without horror, was contemplated by the followers of Jesus with a calm and settled serenity, which sat on their countenances in the form of patient resignation, and was expressed by their lips in the language of devout acquiescence. While they deemed it allowable and innocent to give vent to the feelings of humanity, in cherishing a holy regret for the friend whose company they had lost, they judged all immoderate grief inconsistent with the principles of those who were "not to sorrow as men without hope." Looking upon death as making but a temporary separation between living and departed friends,—as introducing the soul into the immediate enjoyments of heaven, and as only lulling the body into a state of repose, from which it would be eventually awakened to join its sainted partner in the realms of bliss, they mingled their natural lamentations, for the loss of the deceased, with joy that he had now entered on a scene where all the powers of his nature were expanded to their full maturity, and were exercised in perfect blessedness; and accordingly, they were accustomed, in the fashion of the primitive age, to speak of death as a birth,and of their believing relatives, when they died, as then for the first time born.

The pious care which the Christians took of the mortal remains of their brethren, bore as striking a contrast to the indifference or the unnatural cruelty of their heathen contemporaries, as the feeling with which they respectively met the stroke of death. A stoical apathy about the dead, or an inhuman violation of their remains, was then, as it has ever been, characteristic of idolaters. Some of them remorselessly exposed the lifeless forms of their relatives and friends to be trampled under foot, or devoured by birds and beasts

of prey; while others, who boasted a higher place in the scale of civilization, practised a system of funeral rites scarcely less revolting—disembowelling the corpse, as did the ancient Egyptians, and subjecting every member to a disgusting process, in the vain hope of preserving a miserable resemblance to the image of life; or, as was the custom of the Greeks and Romans, applying the ruthless torch to it, as it lay extended on a heap of wood, till the fire reduced all that once commanded admiration and love to the blackness and deformity of ashes. Nature, affection, reason, if they ever pleaded against the inhuman practice, were extinguished at the shrine of a false and degrading religion, and every tender and pleasing association which memory retained, of the beauty and intelligence that played on the living features, was cruelly and at once destroyed, by those whose bleeding hearts often inwardly rebelled against customs to which they were obliged to conform. Christianity, on her first appearance, among the many improvements she made on the temporal habits and usages of men, threw the shield of her protection over the defenceless dead; and although multitudes of her disciples had been taught by education to approve, and by habit to practise, some one or other of the various cruelties which superstition perpetrated on the body, when the spirit had left it, yet no sooner had they embraced the Gospel, than, under the united influence of humanity and religion, their minds recoiled, not less from the spectacle of unburied mortality, than from the barbarities of the funeral pile. From the first, the Christians rejecting these horrid customs, contented themselves with simply removing their dead out of sight, without any unnatural or disgusting attempts to anticipate the process of decomposition. The hour of death, instead of being to them a signal for unfeeling insults on the person of its victims, only gave a new direction to their cares; and, as if the body of their departed friend was still conscious

of attention, and shrunk, in its humiliating state, from observation, they never relaxed their tender offices till they had conveyed it to a place where death might pursue, unobserved in solitude and darkness, the work of destruction he had begun. Their heathen contemporaries beheld with admiration a practice which, however dictated by nature, was a novelty in the ancient world; and few things, perhaps, contributed more to soften the prejudices of pagan observers, and win them to the cause of Jesus, than the amiable assiduities which Christians of all ranks paid to the departed members of their society,—the decent and respectful care with which not only parents consigned the bodies of their children, and friends those of their friends, but nobles the remains of labourers, and masters those of their meanest slaves, to the bosom of their

parent earth.*

So long as the Christians were allowed the tranquil enjoyment of their religion, they never altered their mode, nor withheld from their departed brethren the honours of burial. The necessary expenses, when the family was poor, were defrayed out of the common treasury of the faithful, and every facility and aid was given to all orders of the Christian society to perform a tribute of respect which all deemed it an indispensable duty to bestow. Not that they were haunted by any superstitious dread that the want of the rites of sepulture would keep the disembodied spirit from the enjoyment of its rest, or destroy, as the heathen supposed, their fond hopes of the resurrection; -not that, either leaving the body to whiten on the ground, or consuming it on the funeral pile, could cause pain to the dead, who could not feel, or possessed any terrors to the living, who had no fear of death itself; but they shrunk from the thought of exhibiting any cold indifference or inhumanity to a body on whose face they had often imprinted the kiss of peace,-

^{*} Bingham, vol. x. p. 34.

whose lips had often celebrated the praises of the Saviour,—whose knees had often bent with them at the throne of grace, and towards which they retained many interesting recollections associated with Christian experience and love. Above all, to a body "whose members had been employed as instruments of the Divine will on earth, though mortal in their nature, they thought the highest marks of honour belonged, on account of the reverence due to that sacred guest that deigned to inhabit, and directed them to the purposes of salvation." * Such were the sublime motives by which the Christians, to whom belongs the merit of introducing the practice of interment, were prompted to pay a religious attention to the dead bodies of believers. It was not merely the voice of humanity raising a loud and successful protest against the enormities practised by the heathen on their departed soldiers,—it was not merely the progress of civilization refining and improving the usages of barbarous times, -but it was the pure and instantaneous effect of the religion of Jesus, which represented the material frame of his genuine disciples as still belonging, even when removed from the world, to the communion of saints, and members of the spiritual body of Christ.

Examples of the pious care which the primitive Christians took of the dead, though occasionally met with in the writings of the early historians of the Church, cannot of course be expected to be either numerous or remarkable, so long as the course of providence continued in its smooth and ordinary channel. It is times of persecution only, which, by dragging the Christians from the shades of obscurity and retirement they courted, and writing their history in the blood of many eminent saints, have drawn the attention of posterity to their exemplary conduct in disposing of the dead; and accordingly, it is in their

^{*} Ireland.—Christianity and Paganism compared, p. 153.

solicitude about the martyrs who, by their death, sealed their testimony in the face of the world, that their habit of giving to every member of their community the honours of interment, is strikingly discovered. No difficulties could prevent, and no dangers deter them, from the performance of this pious office. Over rugged mountains and across rapid rivers,—in the darkness of night, and amid the roar of the wintry tempest,-through the spears of the sentinels, who watched the mangled relics, amid the risk of contagion from the unburied masses of humanity that lay in the streets and houses of infected cities, multitudes who prescribed to themselves this perilous course of charity made their way to the scene of martyrdom, and encountered hazards even greater than these, in the execution of their self-imposed task. infuriated mob was discharging their concentrated hate on the victims of the rack or the cross, these boldly approached the feet of the confessor, spreading their napkins to receive his broken limbs, or some drops of his blood; or if the sword of persecution had done its work, they continued with laborious diligence to collect his remains, which were frequently nothing more than bones or ashes—the refuse of the ravenous beasts, or the relics of the funeral pile. Sometimes they offered enormous sums to obtain permission to bury even these; and at other times, they fell victims to their amiable enthusiasm, and had to depend upon others equally charitable, but more fortunate than themselves, for the last offices,—the resolute attempt to discharge which to a martyred brother had cost their own lives. Often, when an intolerant or unfeeling magistrate had refused their application for the martyr's body, have they watched for a favourable moment, and stealing forth under covert of night, transported it on their shoulders to some distant spot, where they hastily prepared a pit for its reception; while in other and more auspicious circumstances, they cheerfully submitted to the greatest fatigue, and incurred heavy expenses in conveying it to the most honourable or appropriate place of burial.* The single circumstance of a band of Christian friends, who had carefully picked up the scattered bones of Ignatius, amid the sands of the amphitheatre, carrying the remains of that venerable bishop from Rome to Antioch, may be mentioned, as one example out of many, of their amiable solicitude that the smallest fragment that had belonged to the person of a believer should be treated with respect,-be placed beyond the risk of violation, and buried with the honours due to the living possessor; † and indeed, among the various channels into which the charity of the primitive Christians poured itself, there was none more frequently necessary, or more highly valued, than that of providing a suitable sepulchre for a brother who had suffered for the faith.

In ordinary circumstances, the funeral ceremonial was conducted in a style corresponding to the character and views of the Christians. Having closed the eyes, and washed the body of the deceased, they sprinkled it with a profusion of costly spices and odoriferous ointments,-a part of the preparation for burial held in so great esteem, that care was taken that none of the poorest of the brethren wanted it. This custom was the more remarkable in them, that their general habits were marked by austerity, and by abstinence from every thing that tended to foster a love for the gratification of the senses; and it often drew from their heathen neighbours the sarcastic remark, that the Christians, notwithstanding they affected to abhor all fragrant perfumes, lavished these expensive luxuries at death more extravagantly than others did in life, and that, too, on persons whose situation rendered them insensible to the enjoyment. But they mistook entirely the object of the Christians in their

^{*} Cave's Primitive Christianity, part ii. p. 273. † Burton's Lectures on the Eccles. Hist. of the Second Century.

copious use of strong scented odours on these occasions, which was not done in the vain hope of giving pleasure to the dead, or heaping attentions on a body soon to become a prey to corruption, but with the view of showing that they looked upon death as a season of joy-not of gloom and despondency,-of testifying their belief that their friend had entered into a new and happier state,—and that he had left them to be present at a joyful festival, whither they hoped soon to go and join his company. These were the cheerful ideas which the sumptuous anointing of the body, previous to burial, was designed to impress on the senses. Nor was it practised altogether without other views to the comfort and uses of the living; for in those frequent troubles that arose in primitive times, and drove the Christians to take refuge in the cemeteries, the strong spices of Sabæa enabled them to remain, and to enjoy the privilege of worship, without any annoyance from the disagreeable effluvia which might otherwise have driven them from these abodes of the dead.*

While, in common with the Jews, the primitive Christians wrapped the body in the robes of the grave, they first introduced the custom of depositing it in a coffin, made of plainer or costlier materials, as suited the rank or resources of the deceased. During the interval that elapsed between the completion of these preparations and the funeral, one of the family by turns, and occasionally the whole household, accompanied by some of their relatives and Christian neighbours, set themselves to watch the corpse—not, however, in the attitude of mourners who brooded in sad and unbroken silence over their bereavement, -but solacing themselves with psalmody and prayer, and free conversation on such subjects as were connected with the hope of believers and the joys of the resurrection. The time appointed for the funeral having arrived, the body was

^{*} Bingham, vol. x. p. 38 ; Cave's Primitive Christianity, p. 274 ; Fleury, p. 251.

carried to the grave on the shoulders of the nearest relatives, or of persons of dignity, when the deceased had been of eminent piety, or borne office in the Church, or sometimes of any Christian friends who volunteered their services, to testify their respect for the memory of departed worth. The solemnity was always performed during the day; and it is the more necessary to take notice of this, because it was an innovation on the long established practice of the heathen, and had to combat, where it was not authoritatively forbidden, the strongest prejudices which their superstition engendered in the minds of the populace. According to their ideas, to come into contact with a dead body was a presage of misfortune, and the mere sight of a funeral disqualified them for the worship of the gods; on which account, as well as from its being supposed a fitter season for grief, they invariably solemnised their funeral obsequies in the night. But the Christians, who had no such superstitious fear of receiving contamination from the dead, and who were supported by strong consolation, changed the time of their burials to the day; and the whole style of the ceremonial observed among them indicated a state of mind that bore a striking contrast to the gloom and extravagant lamentations of the heathen. The nearest relations only wore dresses slightly betokening grief, while the rest of the attendants were attired in habiliments, whose colour was expressive of cheerfulness and joy. The company consisted of an assemblage of men and women, boys and girls, belonging to the Christian society, and as they moved in procession along, their united voices sung in slow and solemn cadence some pathetic psalm, while the pastor, who on such occasions was always a welcome guest, took his place in the family group, and watching if any of the relatives betrayed symptoms of weakness, and of nature sinking under the load of long suppressed grief, endeavoured to fortify him with views of the life and immortality brought to

light by the Gospel, and to remind him, that though a tie had been broken on earth, a new and a happier one had been formed in heaven. This was a noble refinement on the practice of the heathen, whose funeral cavalcades were preceded by the wild and artificial lamentations of the "Præficæ;" women, whose mercenary office was to sing the praises of the dead, and employ every art for exciting the tears of surviving friends.* In the simple rites of the Christians, every part was moulded on the faith and hope of the Gospel, and though, from early associations, they continued the vocal and instrumental music, as an indispensable accompaniment of such solemnities, the chanting of hymns that delighted the ear, while they animated the mind "with joy unspeakable and full of glory," was a happy improvement on the forced and hypocritical strains of the ancient mourners. So much admired, indeed, was the change by the Christians, and so prominent a part did the singing of psalms become in their burial service, that to be borne to the grave in silence was looked upon as a great calamity, and the sacred dirge was refused to none but those who had laid violent hands on themselves, who had suffered the death of malefactors, or who had lived in the obstinate neglect of baptism.

On the brink of the grave, it was customary, especially when the deceased had been distinguished by his attainments in faith and holiness, for the pastor to pronounce an oration, the object of which was not so much to eulogize the merits of an imperfect mortal, as to exhort the by-standers to emulate his virtues, and to be followers of him in so far as he had been a follower of Christ. This discourse was succeeded by the singing of an appropriate psalm, by the recitation of a passage of Scripture—generally the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians—relating to the future resurrection of the body, and if the funeral took place in the morn-

^{*} Neander, vol. i. p. 389.

ing, by the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The funeral service was concluded with a thanksgiving prayer to God for having brought their departed brother to the knowledge, and kept him by His grace in the way of salvation, and with the expression of a fervent desire, that all present might be enabled to lead the life of the righteous, and their latter end be like his.* The body was then lowered into the grave, and alongside of it were deposited some memorials, attesting the Christianity of the lonely tenant—such as a parchment inscribed with his name and conversion, his copy of the Gospels, the instruments of his martyrdom, if he had been a witness for the truth, and a few leaves of evergreen, emblematic of immortality. The attending friends then dispersed, after giving a solemn adieu to the grave. This adieu, however, was far from being associated with the notion of eternal separation. Their minds were too warm with the service in which they had been engaged, with the views of that better country to which their faith had been directed, and with the society of the just made perfect there which their friend that was fallen asleep had joined, to admit any other idea than that of a temporary farewell; and so much were they accustomed to think of their deceased parents, brethren, and children, being still in communion with them, that they always spoke of them as living, as taking an interest in the welfare of their survivors on earth, and as waiting to greet their arrival in heaven. These views of their unbroken relationship with their glorified friends, which they were never wearied in recalling, gave rise to a custom which obtained no where else but among the primitive Christians. the houses of their pagan contemporaries, as in those of the generality of men still, the death of one of their members creates a blank, which, however painfully felt for a while, is soon filled up: domestic tranquil-

^{*} Bingham, vol. x. p. 69; Fleury, p. 260.

lity returns—and the incessant occupations of business or pleasure proceed from year to year-while the name of the lost one is seldom if ever mentioned-and at length his memory is as much forgotten as if he had never been. But it was otherwise with the Christians of the first ages. They thought of their departed relatives as men do of a child or a friend who, having emigrated for a season to a foreign land, is expected to mingle again in the family circle; and with the same lively feelings of interest and joy, with which sojourners at home recall the thoughts of such distant wanderers, and commemorate the return of their birth-day, or any auspicious event of their history, did the early believers maintain fellowship in spirit with their Christian brethren who had gone to "the undiscovered country." The anniversary of their death was held in the family as a festival sacred to the memory of their Christian worth, and the occasion was still farther hallowed by a participation of the Lord's Supper, as celebrated by its first founders. No element of superstition entered into the observance, and the whole of this beautiful domestic solemnity was founded "on the pure evangelic principle of an inseparable communion with those who had died in the Lord." *

The same tone of feeling which introduced into Christian families the custom of commemorating the yearly return of the day on which their believing ancestors had died, led the general community of Christians to celebrate, by a similar memorial, the anniversary of the martyrs' decease. Of these, some had moved only in a limited sphere, and were embalmed in the recollection of their brethren chiefly in a particular quarter of the world; and it was natural, that, on the first institution of festivals to their honour, different churches should perpetuate the memory of those who had lived and laboured in their own immediate circle, and who, though dead, yet spake to

^{*} Neander, p. 390.

them in a way the most powerful and affecting, by the uncommon faith and patience with which they had witnessed their good confession. But there were other sufferers for the cause of truth, whose character had become the property, and whose deeds were regarded as the legacy of the Church universal. These were men who, exercising, by their talents or by their zeal, a commanding influence among the followers of Christ, had, in times of persecution, been selected as the especial victims of imperial or popular vengeance; and who, in circumstances the most trying to the weakness of humanity, and in times when their example of constancy was of inestimable value, had borne a glorious testimony, at once to the truth and the power of the Christian faith. The common love which animated the bosoms of the faithful towards all who any where bore the name of Jesus, was, in the case of these eminent witnesses for the truth, heightened by sympathy for the sufferings, and by admiration for the virtues, of men who displayed all the qualities of heroes; and along with these, there was associated a still stronger and higher feeling,—that of reverence for the character of individuals whom the Saviour had counted worthy to suffer for his sake, and on whom, having confessed His name before men, He had conferred the imperishable crown, and glory of martyrdom. The cold admiration which we now feel in perusing the records of those devoted men who, in the early struggles of Christianity, bore the shame and the pain of cruel mockings and scourgings, gives but a faint and feeble reflection of that enthusiasm of ardent affection of which the martyrs were the objects among their Christian contemporaries; -an enthusiasm all the more intense, that it was confined to the followers of a small and persecuted sect, who, not knowing how soon they might be called to imitate the heroism they admired, were led, by the force of circumstances, to keep the confessors in constant remembrance. Their names

were familiar as household words; and their acts were transmitted from sire to son, as, next to the Scriptures, the most favourite lore in the families of Christians. The patriarchal disciple, who could boast of being their contemporary, or an eye-witness of their last hours, never wanted a group of eager and breathless listeners, as often as he chose to recite the story of their faithful contendings, and memorable sayings, and triumphant departure. The glory of the deceased warriors of the Church was exalted

"Far above all Greek, above all Roman fame."

The mention of any little anecdote, or the possession of any little memorial of them, operated like a talisman in awakening an interest that was felt at the remotest

extremities of the Christian body.

Such being the halo of interest that encircled the name of the martyrs, it is not surprising that the idea of instituting festivals in memory of them, was no sooner started than it met with the unanimous approval of the churches. As there was scarcely an assembly of Christians to be found, throughout the Roman empire, without multitudes whose veins were warmed by the blood of confessors, the love of family concurred with the sentiment of general admiration in introducing the speedy and universal establishment of the custom; and the most enlightened and pious among the rulers of the Church lent the weight of their encouragement, and the sanction of their presence, to an observance which tended so manifestly to foster an emulation of the faith and constancy of holy men. The time fixed for holding these festivals of martyrs, was the anniversary of the day on which they had fallen, as it was thought more suitable to the character of such solemnities, that they should be memorials of the time which put a period to all their sorrows and sins, and ushered the servants of Christ into their heavenly rest; and accordingly, as in the fashion of the primitive age, these were called their birth-days, they

were celebrated with gladness and rejoicing,—though in a manner strictly conformable to the nature of the Christian faith and hope. The place of rendezvous was the tombs of the martyrs, situated, for the most part, in wild and distant solitudes seldom traversed by the feet of men, or concealed in the depths of subterranean dungeons, of which no traces were discernible on the smooth surface of the ground, save by the practised eyes of the primitive believers. To these retreats, where every association of time and place thus contributed to heighten the moral impressions of the scene, the Christians were peculiarly fond of repairing. Every exertion was made, the greatest sacrifices of time, expense, and convenience, were willingly submitted to by the remoter brethren, to enjoy the privilege of attending the observance; and to have been obliged to be absent on an occasion so interesting to the feelings, and, as it was originally gone about, so conducive to religious improvement, would have been considered one of the greatest privations which a follower of Christ could have been doomed to bear. The approaching return of the anniversary was the signal for families and friends collecting into parties to undertake the journey; and in times of tranquillity and religious toleration, long before the hour of meeting, groups of Christian travellers appeared bending their steps along the distant heights, to the spot where some martyr had given his memorable testimony. The service was modelled on that of the Sabbath; and after the Lord's Supper had been partaken of, a collection made for the poor, and a variety of sacred hymns sung, the acts of the martyr whose death was the subject of commemoration, were read publicly, and the whole was concluded by some pastor of eminence for piety and eloquence in moving the passions, enforcing the lessons of faith and holiness that were inculcated in the life and death of the departed worthy.*

^{*} Burton's Lectures; Bingham, vol. iii. p. 114.

The earliest notice of such commemorations occurs in the beginning of the second century, on the martyrdom of Polycarp, and the real character of the festival is sufficiently determined by the reply of the faithful friends who prescribed to themselves the pious task of gathering and interring the confessor's bones. Having deposited, in a suitable place, all that remained of the servant of Christ, they resolved, if Divine Providence should favour them, to return to the tomb on that day twelvemonths, and celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom, with the view not only of cherishing the memory of departed worth, but of holding forth the character of that apostolic man for the encouragement and support of others, who should be called in after-times to give a similar testimony to the faith. It was a reasonable and a Christian service, in which no element of superstition mingled, and no trace of any sentiment was to be found that was not in perfect unison with gratitude for the grace which had enabled the martyr to triumph in his death. By these annual festivals, the deeds of the martyrs were kept in undying remembrance; and while the heathen might have long forgotten them, as men who were too much accustomed to public executions, to make any distinction between the case of a Christian and the crimes of a common malefactor, the brethren rehearsed the fortitude, the faith, and joy of the cloud of witnesses, and stirred up the fires of zeal in the hearts of survivors. The stories of Polycarp, Ignatius, and Cyprian, were chronicled in every memory, and formed the theme of every tongue; and the people, animated by the memoirs of men who had been faithful unto death, returned with minds filled with lofty admiration of their virtues, and burning with ardour to emulate their Christian heroism.*

But this happy influence of the meetings at the tombs of the martyrs did not long survive the age

^{*} Augustine preached an anniversary sermon at Cyprian's tomb.

that gave them birth. While men repaired to them with Christian views of the heroism they admired, and the commemoration service was simply an outpouring of strong, generous, deep-toned sympathy with the principles of those whose dust was sleeping around them, the observance of these anniversaries had a sublime moral effect on the tone of Christian feeling and habits,—it imparted energy to the weak, resolution to the timid, enthusiasm to the lukewarm, added fresh fuel to the flame that already glowed in the bosoms of the devout, and united all classes of the brethren more closely in the bonds of a holy confederacy to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. In proportion, however, as Christians declined in piety, and showed a disposition to attach more importance to the form than to the spirit of religious solemnities, the memorials of the martyrs gradually lost their character, and became, from various causes, a source of the grossest corruptions. One of these arose out of a simple and beautiful practice. had been customary, at their anniversaries, as on many other occasions, when the primitive Christians met together, to celebrate a love-feast; and as the remoteness of the situation rendered it inconvenient for the wealthier brethren to bring, as usual, a supply of provisions for the common table, the custom gradually crept in of establishing a regular market on the spot. Stalls were placed, booths erected, and articles of food and luxury sold by people who sought to combine attendance on a religious festival with the driving of a gainful traffic. For a long time no evil resulted from this innovation,—the solemnity of the occasion, the vicinity of a hallowed sepulchre, and, above all, the impressive nature of the accompanying services, tending to repress all approach to intemperance. times, however, scenes of excess and revelry did take place, to the deep regret and mortification of every pious mind; in consequence of which it was resolved,

that the love-feasts, which had been indirectly the occasion of leading to such abuses and dishonour to the martyrs, should be entirely abolished, and the anniversary, restored to its ancient character, should exhibit no kind of preparation or rejoicing but what was strictly in unison with a religious festival.*

Another corruption of far greater magnitude, and of which the origin was more deeply seated, traced its growth to these yearly solemnities. Each successive generation, as it removed from the times of the martyrs, strove to surpass the preceding in admiration of their character and deeds. The more men departed from their spirit, the higher was the regard they cherished for their memory, till they were at length thought of as superior to the common run of humanity, and their tombs approached with a degree of veneration almost bordering on idolatry. It was, perhaps, a natural feeling, that any little memorials of these excellent and holy men should be preserved with affectionate solicitude; and many such interesting legacies, we know, were bequeathed by the martyrs to their relatives and friends, who dared to witness their last testimony, —such as that of a ring, which a dying confessor took from his finger, and plunging it in his blood, gave it to a bystander, with an earnest request, that as often as he looked upon that trinket, he would remember for whom and for what the possessor had suffered; and of a copy of the Gospels, which was privately given by another to his friend, and the value of which was greatly enhanced by its being inscribed with prayers and devout reflections of the venerable owner. And, perhaps, it was no less a natural feeling, to show every mark of care and respect to their bones and mangled remains, that could be rescued from the fires of martyrdom, as the dust of men whose bodies had been living temples of God, and their organs instruments of doing his will and engaging in his worship. But when these natural

^{*} Cave, ii. p. 278; Bingham, vol. ii. p. 75.

aud innocent feelings had assumed the character of superstitious reverence,—when, from holy regret and reverend remembrance, they rose to foolish and ignorant homage, and from humble thankfulness for the grace that had made them stedfast and immovable, and honoured instruments of testifying the truth and the power of the Gospel, the degenerate professors of Christianity came to ascribe to them attributes, and to dignify them with honours higher than what were due to men, these anniversary memorials of the martyrs became so many polluted fountains, from which was yearly discharged an increasing torrent of superstition on the churches.* Some who brought over with them to Christianity the feelings and associations of pagans, looked upon these nearly in the same light with the feasts of revelry they had been accustomed to celebrate in honour of their gods. Many whose love had waxed cold, and in whom the flame of piety had almost flickered to a close, were anxious to make up for the defects of their religious character by an ostentatious regard for the memory of the faithful confessors; and thus, from a variety of causes, the solemnity was diverted from the simple and useful purpose of the institution. The form was religiously retained, the annual honours were faithfully paid to the slumbering relics' of mortality, and crowds of travellers, far greater than in earlier times, bent their footsteps to the scene of the observance. But no traces were discernible of that sublime moral influence which the commemoration services had formerly produced, -no heart felt the generous enthusiasm, or was nerved with that energy of feeling and pious resolve, which in a better and purer age had pervaded the worshippers at the tomb of the martyrs.

These tombs, as well as the sepulchres of ordinary Christians, were situated, as we have already said, in wild and sequestered spots. This practice, which

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. i. p. 152.

early and universally obtained among the followers of Christ, of removing their dead to inaccessible and unfrequented solitudes, originated both in an amiable desire of preserving their graves from violation and insult, and in the painful necessity by which they were often driven to court the most profound obscurity and concealment. Pursued with odium even to the grave, they were denied the privilege of interring the bodies of their deceased relatives and friends in the common cemeteries. By the sides of the roads and highways, the usual burying-places among their Roman contemporaries, all classes of people might indiscriminately deposit the ashes of their friends, but the proscribed followers of Jesus; and when, from any circumstances, one of that despised class found a resting-place among the public sepulchres, and some simple monument told that a Christian was sleeping underneath, no measure of precaution could save the unconscious occupant receiving a thousand indignities from the passers-by,and not unfrequently has the rage of an excited populace led them to violate the sanctuary of the tomb, and practise inhuman barbarities on the uncoffined remains. Nay, such was the obloquy that attached to the name of Jesus, that no heathen would be prevailed upon, by entreaties or bribes, to allow the smallest portion of his land to be polluted by Christian dust; and the adherents of the unpopular sect would have been subjected to the grievous calamity of leaving the corpses of their most beloved and honoured friends without the rites of sepulture, had they not been accommodated with some private or unoccupied ground, the property of charitable persons well-affected to their cause.*

But by far the great number of the primitive Christians were buried in subterranean sepulchres. As, during the first three hundred years the sword of persecution was constantly impending over their heads,

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. ii. p. 123.

and dear-bought experience taught them, that their only safety lay either in withdrawing to uninhabited deserts, or sheltering themselves in inaccessible hiding holes, multitudes, who preferred the latter alternative, died, and were interred in their places of retreat. These served at once as their home and their buryingplace; and, as it was natural that they should wish to have the bodies of their departed brethren conveyed to the same peaceful and inviolable sanctuaries, it became, first from necessity, and afterwards from choice, the approved and invariable practice of the Christians to deposit their dead in deep and obscure caverns. These, owing to the vast multitudes who fell simultaneously in times of persecution, and to whom, except in some few cases, the rites of burial were not refused, evidently required to be of no ordinary magnitude; and accordingly—at what time is uncertain, but at an early period—the charity of some wealthy friends of their body put them in possession of cemeteries, which remained ever after the common property of the be-Among the monuments of Christian antiquity, none are more singular than these abodes of the dead; and one feels at a loss whether most to admire their prodigious extent, the laborious industry that provided them, or the interesting recollections with which they are associated. Like the Moorish caves in Spain, they were generally excavated at the base of a lonely hill, and the entrance so carefully concealed that no aperture appeared, and no traces were discernible—except by an experienced eve—of the ground having been penetrated, and of the vast dungeons that had been hollowed underneath. scent was made by a ladder, the foot of which stood in a broad and spacious pathway, which extended like a street along the whole length of the place. This principal entrance opened, at intervals, into smaller passages, which again led into a variety of chambers; and on either side of them were several rows of niches,

pierced in the wall, serving as catacombs, and filled with coffins. The chambers were painted, for the most part, like the churches, with passages of history from the Old and New Testaments. In the centre of the large street was an open square, large and commodious as a market-place, in which those who took refuge there, in those troublous times, were wont to congregate for worship; and the comfort of which, as a place of abode, was greatly promoted by the liberal use which the Christians made of spices and perfumes on their dead. In the more distant of these cemeteries, whose remoteness rendered them less liable to be disturbed, there were small apertures left in the surface of the ground, through which a dim twilight was admitted; but the others, where these were closed, were absolutely dark, and, except by the aid of lights, impassable; so that, on any sudden surprise, the refugees had only to extinguish their lamps to insure their safety from the invasion of their enemies. depth of these vaults was sometimes so great, that two or three storeys were ranged one above another; and the whole aspect of the place conveyed the impression of a city under ground.

To these spacious cemeteries the primitive Christians had often for years to betake themselves for shelter; and security as well as custom reconciled them to a mode of life whose gloom and loneliness were unrelieved by scarcely any of the ordinary attractions that sweeten the life of man. Indeed, they were so led, by the habitual disposition of their minds, to indulge in meditations among the tombs, that the transition from the ordinary course of the world to the unbroken solitude of the catacombs, was less felt by them than perhaps it would have been by any other class; and the fondness they contracted for these places of abode, as well as the moral influence they produced on the minds of the Christians, was such, that many severe edicts were issued by the emperors, to prohibit

their frequenting them. They proved, in earlier and purer times, "when the blood of Christ was warm in the hearts of men," the chief nurseries of Christianity; for there many received their first impressions of religion. Unbelieving spectators, who witnessed the honour and reverence that was paid to the departed worthies, who had resisted unto blood, and were at length rewarded with a crown of glory, were led to inquire into the nature of that faith for which they had been the invincible champions; and, while they observed the sober, orderly, and devout character of the solemnity, so beautifully contrasted with the tumult and bacchanalian revelry of the heathen festivals,—the simple rites, the enlivening melody, the temperate lovefeast, the pure and benevolent feelings that pervaded the assemblage,—were frequently brought from cold admiration to love,—from love to the obedience of faith. Others, again, who were already in the ranks of the faithful, were animated and encouraged anew to follow the glorious example of the heroic martyrs who were commemorated before their eyes; and while they came with glowing hearts, but with sober judgments, -not as their degenerate posterity,—to reverence more than human sanctity, or offer the smallest tribute of superstitious honour to the remains of the dead, but to express their adoption of the principles for which these had bled, admiration of the Christian virtues they had exhibited, and a resolution, through grace, to tread in the footsteps of men who

"Taught them how to live, and—oh! too high, The price of knowledge—taught them how to die,"

the mighty multitude felt as of one mind and one heart. The story of the martyrs,—their meek deportment,—their cruel sufferings,—the serene features that smiled forgiveness to their persecutors, or were lighted up with the beams of faith and joy,—each, as they were, with circumstantial minuteness, detailed in the faith-

ful register,* touched the cords of sympathy in every bosom. The dying testimonies of the holy men, and the impassioned eulogies bestowed by their honoured pastors on the character and deeds of their sainted predecessors, came to the hearers like thoughts that breathe, and words that burn. Impressions were made, and purposes formed, which long survived the scene that gave them birth; and the acts of the martyrs, like the far-famed war songs of Tyrtæus, which turned cowards into heroes on the battle-field, infused the energy of Christian fortitude into many timid and wavering Christians, who returned from the tombs, resolved to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

But it was not only on such anniversary occasions that the primitive Christians frequented the sepulchres of the martyrs. Unhappily, they were often driven to them by the sword of persecution; and at other times, when, though their lives were spared, they were denied the free exercise of their religion, they had no alternative between abandoning their worship and violating the laws, but by sheltering themselves in the obscurity of the cemeteries. While the vigilance of their pursuers was suspended by slumber, or relaxed in the downy lap of luxury, the followers of Jesus betook themselves to their subterranean asylum, to enjoy the valued privilege of worship. In these retreats multitudes lived for weeks and months without seeing sun, moon, or stars. The aged and the poor were maintained by the munificent liberality of those whose affection to their cause had provided the sanctuary, or by the contributions of the young and vigorous, who poured the fruits of their industry into the common fund, as they returned, under the friendly protection of night, to the company of the proscribed believers. In these profound and spacious caverns, whose gloom and solitude were but ill relieved by the glimmer of a

^{*} Notarics were early employed, as we learn from Cyprian, to extract from the public records authentic copies of the trial, and sentence, and behaviour of the martyrs.

hundred tapers, and whose walls were lined with immense rows of catacombs, in which reposed the august remains of their fathers and brethren, who had died in the faith, they spent their midnight vigils in edifying one another with the things pertaining to the common salvation; and, while the storeyed vaults echoed with the notes of praise, piety was fanned into a holier fervour, faith awakened the sublimest emotions, and the close contact of the living with the venerable dead, whose spirits were still in communion with their survivors on earth, gave to the hope of immortality all the strength and vividness of a present reality, filling the hearts of all with a "joy unspeakable and full of glory," far more than compensating for their banishment from the cheerful haunts of men.* Long after their meetings had ceased to be clandestine, the cemeteries continued to be the favourite haunts of the Christians; and it was the more convenient to use them for the offices of devotion as well as of burial, that the followers of Jesus required no consecrated temple, no gorgeous altar, no outward pomp, or emblems of religion. Go wherever fancy or necessity might call them, they could perform their simple rites in any place where two or three met together in the name of Christ; and, as habit had familiarised them with the profound solitude of the catacombs, and association made them love to pursue their " meditations among the tombs," they preferred, even in intervals of peace, frequenting these subterranean abodes, to the upper rooms, where their first assemblies had been held. Hence, among the various channels into which the charity of the primitive age directed itself, it became a favourite object with the wealthier Christians to excavate cemeteries, with a view not only of gratifying the prevailing taste of the times, but also of providing accessible places of refuge in any sudden emergencies. The greatest

^{*} Bingham, vol. iii. p. 275; Burton, vol. ii. p. 60; Orsi. Hist. Eccles., vol. iii. p. 53; Sir W. Gell's Subterranean Rome.

ingenuity was displayed in diversifying the entrances, and removing all traces of labour or skill, that might arrest the eye of suspicion; and so effectual was the concealment, that the cemeteries were seldom discovered by the heathen persecutors, except when some false disciple purchased an ignominious indemnity to himself by betraying the secret of his brethren. of them, however, never came to the knowledge of the enemy; and one was only discovered, about three miles from Rome, so late as the end of the sixteenth century, the size and various apartments of which excited universal astonishment. Numbers still remain, bearing the names of their respective founders, and affording, by their inscriptions, and the monuments of antiquity found in them, the most satisfactory proofs of their having been used as hiding-places by the Christians. From their habit of courting the obscurity of the catacombs, the Christians obtained, from their heathen contemporaries, the name of the "Light-hating People;" and to their religious familiarity with these abodes of the dead, the reflecting reader will be disposed to trace that general desire for martyrdom which, in the second and third centuries, astonished the authorities of Rome, and crowded the tribunals of all the provinces.* Strange as that insensibility to suffering and death may seem, its origin is naturally to be imputed to the strong influence of place, operating on the minds of men who, by daily contact with the venerable remains of their ancestors. had overcome the instinctive dread of dissolution, and in whom vivid impressions of religion, and the hope of immortal glory, together with the extraordinary estimation in which the memory of the martyrs was

^{*} The earlier martyrs adopted every precaution to avoid falling into the hands of their enemies, and challenged martyrdom only when they could not preserve their lives without the sacrifice of a good conscience toward God. In later times, multitudes conted the honours of martyrdom. It is to this latter class the passage in the text refers.

held, had created a passionate longing for similar honours.**

The preceding pages delineate the manners, not of one distinguished sect among the primitive Christians, but of the whole body of believers during the first three centuries. The picture is unique,-altogether unparalleled in the moral history of mankind; and certainly not the least remarkable of its features is, that wonderful harmony in sentiment and feeling, in habits and pursuits, which characterised the followers of Jesus, in whatever quarter of the world they were found. contemporary millions who, throughout the vast extent of the Roman empire, were united under the same government and laws, stood apart from each other by the greatest diversity of local customs and national peculiarities: the inhabitants of Italy were unlike the effeminate Persians; and the polished Athenians wide as the poles asunder from the rude barbarians of Germany and Gaul. But among the Christians, of whatever name, or country, or colour,-whether they resided on the banks of the Tiber or the Jordan, in the luxurious cities of Greece and Svria, or along the remote shores of Africa,—the same characteristic tone of manners prevailed. That similarity of customs, which neither the sword nor the institutions of Rome could introduce among people so variously circumstanced and widely scattered, was accomplished by the transforming influence of the Gospel. Jews and heathens, votaries of the most grovelling superstitions, and disciples of the most renowned schools of philosophy, men who had been trained up in customs and modes of faith the most opposite to each other, no sooner embraced Christianity, than they exhibited, in common,

^{*} See the works of Bosius, Boldetti, Sir William Gell on Subterranean Rome. The author has principally followed Aringhius, of whose learned work most modern works on the subject are little more than a copy.

traits of character, and habits of living, by which all men knew at once that they had been with Jesus; and the Christian traveller, who was familiar with the domestic, social, and religious manners in the parent church of Jerusalem, found, to his delight and comfort, at the firesides, in the society, and in the sacred assemblies of the brethren in Antioch, Ephesus, Rome, and Carthage, the same customs he witnessed at home, practised by a foreign people, and spoken of in an

unknown tongue.

Some of these manners, the reader will have observed, are the native effect of Christian principle, and are characteristic of the followers of Jesus in every age and country of the world. Of this description are their indifference to the world—their humble and mortified spirit—their meek and patient toleration of injuries—their noble charity to the poor, the afflicted, and the dying-virtues which, together with the amiable acts they constantly gave rise to, in the family, in business, and in the general intercourse of life, stood in marked contrast to the conduct of the heathen, who applauded and practised the opposite qualities. In the same class are to be ranked, their meetings in the name of Christ on a stated daytheir observance of the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper—their reading of the Scriptures—prayer their devout attention to the bodies of the dead, and similar observances. Both of these, though, from the long prevalence of Christianity in the world, and the spirit of refinement it has infused into the general habits and institutions of life, they are now well known and familiar occurrences, came on the world in the first ages with the freshness of novelty, and were remarked as distinguishing traits of the followers of Jesus. Other parts of the manners of the primitive Christians were the slow and gradual product of circumstances. One man, for instance, of fervent piety, desirous of increasing his devotional habits, and enli-

vening his Christian affections, invented a practice which he found in his own experience to be eminently conducive to that purpose. Some of his friends, who had a profound regard for the character of the holy man, followed his example by adopting the custom, till, by degrees, the circle of imitators widening, it acquired the stability of a general practice, and was handed down to the succeeding age as a traditionary observance of the church. In this way arose the custom of washing the hands before prayer, or reading the Scriptures, -of reading and singing psalms at meals,-of making the sign of the cross,-of delivering burial orations,-taking the sacrament in private houses,-holding anniversary meetings at the tombs of the martyrs,—and such like. Some, again, evidently took their origin from the troubled and disastrous circumstances of the church in the first ages; as, for instance, the long course of preparatory instruction prescribed for the catechumens; and the tedious and severe discipline through which the penitents were made to pass,-both of which measures were resorted to as prudential means, not only of sustaining a high standard of Christian excellence in the Church, but of excluding all of a worldly or doubtful spirit, who, when tribulation or persecution arose, might easily fall away, and bring dishonour on the Christian name. Others were of heathen origin, and owed their introduction into the practice of Christians, either to the lingering taste of the pagan converts, who retained a fondness for some of the more innocent customs to which they had been bred,—or to the indiscreet zeal of some pious men, who, wishing to gain over a number of the heathen, Christianized some of their more familiar and harmless ceremonies. Thus, from a variety of causes, customs and observances gradually crept into the primitive Church, which, in process of time, acquired a traditional authority with the primitive Christians; and although many

of these originated, and were long known only in particular places, yet, from the admirable unity which pervaded the Church in apostolic times, Christians were led to respect the manners of their brethren, although somewhat different from their own, and were ever ready to imitate and adopt any observance that prevailed in foreign churches, which being no way contrary to the spirit of Christianity, tended to foster their habits of piety and Christian virtue. In short, all the customs and practices, which in those days were generally sanctioned by the Church, originated in a spirit of fervent piety, which animated and controlled the whole life and energies of the believers, and without taking which into account as an essential element of the manners of the primitive Christians, no reader is qualified to judge of their interesting story, and their peculiar condition. Many of their observances are now practised as unmeaning ceremonies, and known only as connected with the service of Popish superstition; but at their first origin they were resorted to as the auxiliaries of pure and fervent piety; and it was only as a means of promoting it in their hearts and lives, they were incorporated with the manners of the primitive Christians.



OF THE

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.



CHAPTER I.

TRIALS.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS—PERSECUTIONS—BY THE JEWS—THE GREEKS—
THE ROMAN EMPERORS—NERO—DOMITIAN—TRAJAN—HADRIAN—MARCUS
AURELIUS—SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AND CARACALLA.

It was a favourite idea of ancient philosophy, that if Virtue were to descend from heaven in the garb of Humanity, she would present a spectacle so beautiful and attractive, as would captivate all hearts, and lead mankind every where to pay her the spontaneous tribute of their love and reverence. Speculations, as to the object of religious worship, and the foundations of moral duty, were, it was alleged, too exalted and refined for the gross understandings of the multitude; and even of the wiser few, who, by their sagacity and knowledge, could rise superior to the prejudices or superstition of their age, their opinions had too remote and feeble a hold to exert any governing influence on their character and life. But were virtue to be embodied in a human form, and to reveal her native loveliness in a living exemplar, such an appeal to the senses in her behalf—such a visible representation of her beauty and excellence would, it was thought, constrain all men to imitate what they loved, and to follow what they admired. This hoped-for descent was actually made in the person of Him who, in the fulness of time, veiled the splendours of Deity to tabernacle for a

while in the world, and who, both in the purity of his doctrine and the excellence of his example, exhibited virtue in a state of perfection—far surpassing all that had ever entered the wishes, or struck the imaginations of men. But, alas! the result was very different from what had been fondly anticipated. Instead of the welcome reception and the grateful homage, which speculative dreamers had supposed he would meet with from an admiring world, he was made the victim of calumny, persecution, and contempt. Throughout the whole course of his life, he was called to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself, and never was the malice of his enemies satisfied, nor their weapons of war laid aside, till they had raised the shout of infernal triumph over his premature grave. religion he bequeathed to the world, and the people, who, embracing it, acquired a character congenial to the mind that was in him, inherited the thorny fate of their Master. The one was from its infancy surrounded by innumerable perils—it was despised by the great derided by the wise-and traduced as a vile and pestilent superstition by all. The others, in consequence of their honest and inflexible attachment to it, as a revelation of the will of God, were branded with every odious epithet-were made the victims of Jewish bigotry—the butt of Grecian satire; and among the Romans, they alternately became so much the objects of popular fury and imperial vengeance, that to them alone, of all classes of her subjects, the empire seemed to have denied that justice and protection, which she boasted was the common and indiscriminate care of her government. For the first three hundred years. the progress of Christianity is traced chiefly by the blood of her followers, and the fires that were kindled to destroy them. The works of the early apologists abound with harrowing details of the corporal sufferings-the public and private indignities-the trials of every kind and degree to which her disciples in primitive times were subjected; and we find, by the interesting documents they have transmitted to us, under the name of appeals and remonstrances to the Roman tribunals, that, while every form of worship, and the greatest latitude of religious opinion was allowed to all other sects, toleration was a blessing unknown to the Christians-torture and death were the penalty of "Other men," exthe mere confession of her faith. claimed Justin Martyr, "acknowledge what gods they will, and you hinder them not; while they unite in adoring the most senseless and disgusting objects, there is sometimes the widest diversity of opinion among the worshippers themselves; and yet, even to these sects, bigoted to their several duties, and hostile to each other on their account, you, Romans, show an equal clemency, and allow their discordant practices. To Christians alone you object, that they worship not the same god with yourselves; and you devote us to death, because we do not adore dead men, and propitiate them by sacrifices, placed upon their altars."* This opposition to the purest and most benevolent religion the world ever saw, is doubtless to be traced, in the first instance, to the native corruptions of the human heart, developed at that time, in the rankest luxuriance, and the maturest strength, by the obscene rites that were celebrated as worship, and the gross pleasures that constituted the public pastimes of the people. But much of the hostility which Christianity and her followers encountered, proceeded also from ignorance of its nature and design -ignorance originating in indifference confirmed by contempt, and industriously increased by the interested and alarmed abettors of ancient superstition. On those who were capable of inquiring into the religion of Jesus, and the character of his followers, the strongest prejudices operated to prevent them from examining the subject with close and patient attention. Multitudes were too much the votaries of fashion,

^{*} Second Apology, quoted, Ireland, p. 7.

and too passionately fond of the public games and spectacles, which were every where practised in that luxurious age, to trouble themselves about the peculiarities of a people so unsocial, gloomy, and mortified as the Christians appeared to be. Others, elated with the dignity and pride of philosophy, looked with a distant and contemptuous eye on a religion which, spurning all alliance with the schools, and patronized and propagated only by fishermen and mechanics, asserted a presumptuous claim to be exclusively considered the truth. In the eyes of politicians—who had no other views of religion than as a part of the public institutions of the State—the Christians, who forsook the temples, and refused to participate in the rites of the established worship, stood in the criminal attitude of a band of conspirators, whose existence was prejudicial alike to the public safety and revenue. The contemptuous indifference of the one, and the jealous fears of the other, were industriously strengthened by the ministers of the reigning superstition, whose malicious fictions were greedily swallowed by the credulous populace; and unfortunately, many of the magistrates also, too easily yielding to popular prejudices and priestly influence, authorised the most cruel proceedings against the Christians, for no other reason than that their sect was every where spoken To criminals of every order and of every name, the clemency of the public authorities was frequently extended; and the anniversary festivals in honour of the emperors were always signalized by the opening of the prison to them that were bound. But to the Christians no day of grace arrived,—no acts of indemnity were passed. To them alone the door of justice was shut, -over their heads the sword of persecution hung for ages by a single hair; and although the criminal annals of antiquity do not contain one solitary instance of a follower of Christ being accused and convicted of fraud, rapine, or any moral offence

against the laws of society,* yet, in public and in private, by night and by day, insults were allowed to be poured, and outrages to be perpetrated with impunity, on an innocent people, who, on account of their religion alone, were universally proscribed, and denied the common lot and privileges of subjects of the Roman empire. "If we are guilty," says Athenagoras, in his address to the emperors Aurelius and Commodus, "we do not refuse to be punished; nay, we call for the utmost severity of punishment. But if our only guilt be the name of Christians, it is your duty to protect us from the injuries which we suffer." Thus fearlessly did this ancient apologist and his brethren challenge the strictest inquiry into the habits and practices of the Christians, and remonstrate against their hard fate, which, however little they deserved it, they were long before prepared to expect. Before His departure from the world, their Divine Master had frequently apprised them, in minute detail, of the manifold trials which should every where await the adherents of His cause :- "They should be delivered up to the councils, and scourged in the synagogues,-they should be brought before governors and kings for a testimony against them and the Gentiles,—they should be hated of all men for His sake, -and many who should kill them would think that they did God service." These prophetic warnings were mournfully realized in the experience of the primitive Christians. Trying, indeed, beyond description, was the state of our holy faith, not only when confined to the country which cradled its infancy, but after it had obtained a "local habitation and a name" in every quarter of the world. As if a universal conspiracy had been formed to extirpate it from the earth, the same weapons of warfare

^{*} The only instance that has the *appearance* of a crime, is that of Nemesion, whom Gibbon represents as a robber, though he was a Christian. But Eusebius says, merely, that he "was burnt with robbers;" and Davies has most satisfactorily shown, that the heathen judges often classed Christians with the vilest criminals.—*Davies' Examination of the 15th and 16th chapters of Gibbon's History*.

were directed, the same modes of attack were practised against the early believers in every place. punished and secretly traduced, they experienced the fate, though they had no resemblance to the character, of the son of Hagar. While malice invented, and the hand of violence inflicted on them an infinite variety of sufferings, these were more than rivalled—they were outdone by the strange and incredible calumnies which were universally circulated and believed against them. Moreover, among the trials of the primitive Christians, not the least remarkable circumstance is, the elaborate pains their enemies took, the mean artifices they practised, to ensuare them into idolatry, or gain them over to the slightest compliance with the rites of superstition. The fortitude that stood proof against torture or the stake, was perseveringly plied with secret stratagems. The throwing of a handful of incense on the altar, the eating of a morsel of the sacrifices, or a passing nod to a statue, would have been hailed as a token of liberality deserving to be rewarded with life and liberty; and the artful address with which the Pagans endeavoured to steal those outward appearances of homage,—to which the growing triumphs of Christianity added every day a greater value,-was worthy of being expended in a better cause. The whole story of the trials and persecutions of the early believers,—the calumnies heaped on them,—the snares laid to entrap them, -and the various ways in which they were disposed of, forms a curious and interesting chapter in the history of mankind; and, in proposing to lay before the reader a detailed account of them, it seems proper to begin with tracing the reception the Christians met with from the Jews,—the first people in the bosom of whose society they were found.

So early as the apostolic age, we find the followers of Jesus thrown, by their countrymen in Judea and Samaria, into the furnace of affliction. They were

doomed to bear hunger and thirst, were naked and buffeted, and had no certain dwelling-place; and the account which Paul has left on record, of his own chequered lot, may be applied, as literally descriptive of that of the collective multitude of disciples,abundant labours, frequent imprisonments, various and unceasing perils by sea and land, from their own countrymen, and from the heathen, and "the bonds and afflictions which awaited them in every city." The lapse of time increased, instead of allaying, the relentless spirit of hostility to the Christians, which vehemently raged in the universal bosom of the Jews; and history does not, amid the many humiliating views of humanity it exhibits, present a more odious picture than that of the malignant delight which the degenerate posterity of Israel manifested in inventing measures "to crush the wretch." Shorn of their honours and existence as a nation,—their capital, and its temple, the glory of the whole earth, equally reduced to a heap of ruins,—their pride humbled,—their hopes ridiculed,—their very name a proverb of contempt in the world, they could forget the misfortunes of a conquered dynasty, and a wretched exile, in their fiendish eagerness to repress the rising progress of the Gospel. Not content with having imbrued their hands in the blood of Jesus, and expelled the contemporary believers beyond the precincts of their own country, they saw with jealous alarm the silent celerity with which the ranks of the Christians were every where replenished with new recruits, and triumphing over their haughty contempt for their imperial masters, they applied to them for delegated powers to apprehend, impeach, and destroy all who bore the name of Jesus. In this extraordinary crusade, to defray the expenses of which contributions were liberally made by the wealthy of their class, they literally compassed sea and land, propagating all manner of stories to the prejudice of the

Christians, blaspheming the name of Christ as an infamous impostor, and describing his followers as a set of unprincipled and worthless wretches, whom the interests and honour of society required to be doomed to share the fate of their Master. These men, full of all subtlety and mischief, spread themselves into every city, village, and hamlet, leaving no means untried by which they could carry on the war of extermination against the Christians. They first insinuated themselves into private society,—here, fabricating artful stories; there, pouring forth vehement invectives, -now dropping obscure hints; then making the most infamous charges; till, having poisoned the private ears, and roused the detestation of the populace, they addressed themselves to the governors and public officers,—the more intolerant and violent of whom they inflamed by false allegations of conspiracy and treason. Some they gained by corruption, others by fear,—so that they succeeded in rendering the Christians as much the objects of universal odium as themselves have been, by a dreadful retribution of Providence, among modern nations.* The most lamentable consequences resulted from this infernal mission. Disowned so anxiously by the people with whom they were at first confounded by the heathen, and represented in the most odious light by those to whom it was naturally supposed they were best known, the Christians soon perceived the fatal effects of Jewish enmity; and perhaps most of the calamities which, in the first age, befell the adherents of the Gospel, owed their origin to the memory and secret influence of those slanderous reports which those mercenary emissaries of the house of Israel drew from their travelling stock of lies.

* Ireland .- Paganism and Christianity Compared, p. 17; Justin Martyr's

reland.—raganism and Christianity Compared, p. 17; Justin Martyr's Sec. Apol., p. 171; Thirlby's Notes.
† There were also many local persecutions by the Jews, especially in Jerusalem, during the troubles occasioned by the impious pretender Barchochab; who, finding it impossible to rouse the Christians to aid his cause, commenced the most dreadful outrages on all who bore that name in the city.

The Greeks did not fall a whit behind the Jews in the intensity of their hatred to the Christian name, although they looked upon the Gospel with other feelings, and from a different point of observation. The doctrine of the Christians, while it roused the enmity of the latter, by wounding their pride in the most tender point,—the perpetuity of their faith and worship was no less offensive to the former, by interfering with their claims to a monopoly of wisdom; and never did the people who, with affected disdain, called all other nations by the name of barbarians, breathe a spirit of more implacable revenge than when they saw the honour and interests of their philosophy at stake by the silent inroads of the religion of Jesus. Their hostility, however, vented itself not so much in the vulgar form of bodily pains and penalties-their Roman masters having deprived them of the power of the sword,—although, notwithstanding, there were occasionally outbursts of popular feeling, which proved disastrous to the Christians,—as in the refined cruelties of wit and ridicule; and every one who knows the exquisite pungency of their satire, and the peculiar opportunities which, at their games and public market-places, they possessed of circulating it over the length and breadth of the land, will perceive that those weapons of war would cause incessant annoyance to the Christians, and make their mingling in Grecian society the source of indescribable trials. was the pride of wisdom, more perhaps than the degeneracy of public manners, which roused the Greeks to arms against the Gospel. Their national vanity took deep and inexpiable offence at the claim which the Christians advanced to the derivation of all knowledge on morality and religion immediately from God, through the medium of the chosen people; and as they could not deny that most of their boasted philosophy had been imported from the East, and that its founders had merely tried to conceal what they borrowed from

the Scriptures, without often understanding it, under the veil of fable and allegory, they saw no means of maintaining the proud pretensions of their country to be the original source of human knowledge, but by overwhelming with opprobrium and contempt the abettors of the new faith, which threatened, like Aaron's rod, to swallow up all others. Prompted by this vindictive spirit, they read the Scriptures only in order to carp and cavil at them; and having fastened on what appeared the weakest or most obnoxious passages, they dressed them up in the most absurd fashion that their fancy suggested. They ridiculed the artless simplicity of their style, and proclaimed their subjects to be "foolishness," because they were not adorned with the tinsel and artificial eloquence that suited the taste of a degenerate age. tians who believed and expounded these, they despised as a class of low and illiterate mechanics, who had no acquirements beyond the implements of their trade, or the merchandise of their shop, and to whom the very names of Plato and Aristotle, the great masters of Grecian philosophy, was as strange and unknown as were the subtleties and speculations of their schools. But in nothing did their malicious industry employ itself so much, as in exposing the folly and absurdity of the Christians in worshipping as a god a man who had been crucified, and who, instead of having signalized himself, as their demigods had done, by any deeds of extraordinary heroism, or any public institu-tions for the benefit of the world, had associated His name only with some pretended miracles, -nothing better, as they described them, than the contemptible feats of jugglery with which the vulgar were daily deluded at the temples. These contemptuous feelings, which were proudly nourished amid the walks of the Academy and in the purlieus of the Lyceum, were carefully spread among the people. Prizes were offered, and public honours proposed to orators and

poets, who should, with the most cutting sarcasm, and the most powerful eloquence, exhibit as an absurd and incredible fiction the doctrine of the Trinity. Satirical plays were acted on the stage, in which personages, bearing the garb and manner of Christians, were, amidst the universal laughter of the spectators, exhibited in the attitude of praying on their bended knees to an image affixed to a wooden cross. Pictures were pasted on the walls of the temples and streets, of the same obnoxious people in the act of overthrowing images, and blaspheming the gods, or holding up first one cheek and then the other, to be smitten by some ruffian assailants; or clad in mean and tattered garments, with their hands extended, and their eyes uplifted to heaven. Besides, lampoons and pasquinades were frequently scattered in profusion on the streets, to be picked up by any casual passenger; so that in every company, in the gay and luxurious saloons of Athens, Ephesus, and Corinth, the most favourite source of amusement was the newest caricature, or the last bon mot at the expense of the Christians. Even the old women at the stalls, in imitation of their superiors, discharged their scurrilous jests upon them; and the boys at school had their memories filled with satirical songs, and every variety of verbal, written, or pictorial wit, which tended to perpetuate the odium of the devoted believers. Such was the deep and envenomed malignity of the polite Greeks-so sadly did the people who boasted of their supreme dominion in moral and mental refinement, prostitute their accomplishments in knowledge and taste to the degrading office of persecuting holy and excellent men for conscience' sake.*

But the most formidable of all the enemies whose opposition the Christians encountered, were the emperors of Rome, and their representatives in Italy

^{*} Ireland.—Paganism and Christianity Compared, p. 12; Cave's Lives of the Fathers—Paul and Gregory.

and the provinces. As in all countries where despotism is the established form of government, the mildness or severity of the administration depends on the personal qualities of the ruler, so, when the imperial throne of the Cesars was filled by a prince of enlightened views and virtuous dispositions, the benign influences of his reign were felt by countless millions of his subjects at the farthest extremities of the empire. To the unfortunate Christians alone, it was almost always a matter of equal indifference what was the character of the reigning sovereign. If he were, by nature, the slave of caprice, or prone to cruelty, or if he were led, by a bigoted attachment to superstition or prudential motives, to regard with jealousy any innovations in religion, that devoted race were sure to feel the weight of his merciless temper, or intolerant policy. Some of the emperors being such wicked tyrants, so wayward and imperious in their dispositions, that they scrupled not, in the gratification of their lawless passions, to overleap all the barriers of nature and justice; so sunk in brutal vices. that they could not bear the least vestige of virtue or excellence in their subjects; and so inured to crimes of the most gigantic magnitude, that rivers of blood did not satiate their swords,-it is no wonder that the meek and lowly followers of Jesus came in for their full share of the inhuman atrocities that disgraced the reign of these imperial monsters. But what is no less strange than true, the same barbarities were perpetrated by some of the mildest and most virtuous princes that wore the purple in later times; and from whatever cause these outrages proceeded,-whether they were the outbreaks of prejudice or superstition in the royal breast, or were dictated by the ancient Roman policy of tolerating no departure from the established forms of religion,-the Governments of Trajan, Titus, Antoninus, Severus, and Marcus Aurelius, were as infamous for the cruel ill-usage of the

Christians, as were those of their inhuman predecessors, Nero and Domitian.

A brief survey of the most remarkable circumstances that signalized the procedure of those masters of the ancient world towards the infant cause of Christianity, is necessary in a chapter which professes to treat of

the trials of the primitive Christians.

The infamy of being the first to draw the sword against the Christians belongs to Nero, a prince who combined in his own person all the most disgusting qualities and enormous crimes that ever blackened and degraded humanity. But of all the odious features of his character, cruelty seems to have been the crowning vice, as there was scarcely a member of his court, related to him by nature, dignified by station, or recommended by public virtue, in whose life's blood he did not plunge the assassin's shaft. His father, mother, brother, two wives, besides many others of royal and patrician rank, all fell successively by his unnatural poignard, and among all classes of his subjects his severities were so oppressive, that Rome groaned under the scorpion lash of the imperial tyrant. From such a scourge of the human race the Christians could not escape; and while, by malicious calumnies, of which he had privately encouraged the circulation, their condition had been several times embittered, and thousands rendered odious in the eyes of their fellowcitizens, there is one instance of their trials under his reign, which will ever be memorable in the history of persecution, and of which the origin and progress may be briefly told. Among innumerable other freaks of his folly and madness, he became discontented with the narrow streets and the poor antiquated style, of building that distinguished the old city of Rome, and whether it was that he wished to enjoy the singular satisfaction of beholding an immense assemblage of houses in one common conflagration, or to bear the honour of becoming a second Romulus—the founder

of a more beautiful and magnificent capital of the world,—he secretly ordered it to be set on fire, in all parts of the city at once. This remarkable event took place on the 19th July, sixty-four years after Christ; and so well laid were the plans of the royal incendiary, and to so great a height had the flames attained, before the unsuspecting citizens were aware of the full extent of the catastrophe, that no measures of precaution or of force, no lavish use of the waters of the Tyber, could stem the progress of the devouring element. For six or seven days the fire raged with unabated fury, destroying, in its terrific career, palaces, temples, all the most splendid and venerable monuments of antiquity; and at length, when a calm view could be taken of the calamity, it was found, that of the proud city, which boasted of so many superb edifices of religion, and temples of victory,which had witnessed so many proud triumphs, and on whose piazzas and streets foreigners, from every region of the world, had been proud to walk, nothing remained but a few blackened and tottering walls. During the progress of this fearful calamity, while thousands of Roman families were smothered in the falling ruins, or driven naked and houseless wanderers to the fields, Nero had stationed himself in the imperial gardens, where he feasted his inhuman eyes, from the lofty tower of Mæcenas, with the spectacle of horror, and, in the fantastic garb of a player, sang in Homeric strains the destruction of Troy. Universal indignation soon lighted upon him as the guilty cause of the catastrophe. But by address or intimidation, he contrived to divert the attention of the public from himself; and with a meanness and cowardice, equalled only by his pre-eminent atrocity, he sought inglorious safety to himself, by making the vengeance of the citizens fall like a thunder-bolt on the Christians, who, besides their share of suffering the common calamity, had braved the greatest personal dangers,

in their benevolent attempts to rescue the unfortunate sufferers. The mercenary zeal of his creatures having discovered some of the believers, on whom every means of intimidation was practised, the rest of the brethren were, through their weakness or treachery, apprehended, and, on the false pretext of having occasioned the destruction of the city, proceeded against with unexampled severity. Tortures, and modes of death unknown in the criminal code of Rome, were invented for the incendiaries. The majority were bound in combustible garments, which, being set fire to, illumined the darkness of the night, and made the punishment resemble the crime. The spacious gardens of the palace were, with diabolical taste, selected as an appropriate scene of the executions,—Nero himself being conspicuous in the crowded ranks of the spectators; and, while the sad groups of victims were successively led to the stake, tears of pity streamed from a thousand eyes among the assembled multitudes, who knew that the spectacle was exhibited, not for the public benefit, but to gratify the savage heart of one man. The circumstance of this wicked prince ever meditating to criminate the Christians with the conflagration, proves that they had previously been rendered deeply odious to the people,—that the accusation would be credulously entertained, and that the punishment of that class would afford gratification to the mob on account of the calumnious reports of the wickedness to which they were secretly addicted. This persecution, in which a vast number of Christians fell by the most appalling death, among whom were Peter and Paul, was local, being confined chiefly to Rome and its immediate neighbourhood, and lasting about the space of four years. Nevertheless, proofs are not wanting that the atrocities of the emperor were imitated by his underlings in other places. From an inscription discovered in Spain, it appears that not a few Christians in that remote province met the hard

- 208 TRIALS.

fate of their brethren in the metropolis; and this terrible blow gave them the first experimental lesson, in all parts of the empire to which the tidings reached, that they who live godly in Christ Jesus must expect

to suffer persecution.

The brief respite which the Christians enjoyed under the immediate successors of Nero, was broken on the accession of Domitian, in the year of our Lord 81. This prince was a man of indolent, jealous, and arrogant temper; and, by indulging in the savage pastime of stabbing flies on the wall of his chamber-myriads of which he destroyed every day—the young Cesar rose to be the imperial monster, whose appetite could not be glutted with rivers of human blood. As if he had become intoxicated by his elevation to the purple, his subsequent career became an unbroken series of folly and madness, till his capricious humour, not contented to run in the ordinary channels of royal ambition, aspired to the honours of divinity,—caused statues to be erected to his honour, worship to be offered at his shrine, and addresses made to him by the presumptuous title of god. While his obsequious subjects hastened from all quarters to comply with the tyrannical edict, the Christians alone recoiled in horror from the blasphemy; and forthwith confiscation, banishment, and death, became the order of the day. The Evangelist John was sent an exile to Patmos. Flavius Clemens, cousin-german of the emperor, and invested at that time with the consulship, atoned by his death for the crime of being a Christian; while that nobleman's wife, Domitilla, herself also connected with the royal family, was removed, on the same account, to a distant island. By a horrid system of espionage, established in this reign, the trade of an informer became a lucrative one; and, as always happens in such a disorganised state of things, many innocent persons, whose property was coveted, or whose removal, on other grounds, was thought desirable, were dragged to

the tribunals, and accused of Christianity-that charge having now become one of the most common, being always substituted in the absence of all other offences, and ranked next in enormity to the crime of high treason. Where the fountain of justice was so polluted, it is not to be expected that its streams would be otherwise than turbid and impure; and accordingly, with indecent haste, often without the formality of a trial, such was the deep detestation of the Christian name, the inferior magistrates, both in Rome and in the provinces, condemned multitudes to suffer for the name of Jesus. Among the indiscriminate crowd, whom their religion had caused to be enrolled among the proscribed, were two persons in Judea, of the ancient house of David, and very nearly akin to Jesus.* Looking upon that distinguished family as either covertly engaged in a foul conspiracy, or as likely to become a rallying point for the seditious, from the frequent and mysterious allusions made to the kingdom of Christ, Domitian had determined, like his predccessor, the tetrarch, to extirpate the whole race; and accordingly, no sooner had he discovered that two scions of the royal lineage of the Jews were still alive, than he ordered them forthwith into his presence. They appeared simple unlettered men; and, by the most searching inquiries, nothing could be elicited, farther than that they were Jewish peasants,—that their estate was confined within the narrow compass of thirty-nine acres, which they cultivated by their own industry, and by the produce of which they maintained themselves and families in frugal independence, and faithfully paid tribute to the imperial government. Their hands, the hardness of which betokened familiarity with labour, -and their conversation, betraying no capability of forming dark or comprehensive designs, confirming the truth of their artless tale, they were dismissed in

^{*} Euseb. Hist. Eccles., book iii. chaps. 19, 20; Justin Martyr's Second Apology, p. 58.

safety. But although the result of this interview with the relations of Christ, satisfied Domitian that his throne was in no danger from the machinations of these two men, and that they had no view of employing the name of their departed kinsman to erect a rival dynasty, his suspicions were by no means allayed of political dangers to be apprehended from Christian ambition. He continued to authorise or connive at the slaughter of his provincial subjects on account of a religion of which the politicians of the day, though they could fasten no moral offence against its professors, could not divest themselves of the most jealous alarm; and this second persecution was prosecuted with unabated fury, till the unexpected murder of Domitian for a while restored the sword to its scabbard.

The sanguinary proceedings of Nero and Domitian against the followers of Jesus, being rather the furious ebullitions of capricious and desperately wicked tyrants, than the solemn and deliberate measures of state policy, the Christians first became distinct and prominent subjects of Roman legislation in the reign of Trajan. This emperor, who ascended the throne in the year of our Lord 99, found the cruel edicts of Nero and Domitian abolished by the mild and equal administration of his predecessor, Nerva. such was the loose and undefined state of the law regarding them, that a blood-thirsty priesthood, or an enraged and superstitious populace, could annoy them with impunity, and by charging them with enmity to the religion of the empire, demand their execution at pleasure. It was in such circumstances that the celebrated Pliny entered on the provincial government of Bithynia, when Christianity boasted of a numerous train of followers; and the new governor had scarcely been installed into office, when he found his tribunal daily surrounded by multitudes, who were tumultuously dragged thither on a charge of professing the

Christian faith. The crime, and the legal mode of procedure in such a case, were alike strange to him. But, seeing persons of every age, sex, and condition, in remote hamlets, as well as in populous cities, involved in the accusation, and hearing of the temples being deserted, the priests despised, the sacrifices unpurchased, and the most venerable forms of worship honoured with the attendance only of an inconsiderable few, he determined, like a prudent magistrate, not to rely on the uncertain rumours that were affoat, but to institute minute and accurate inquiries into the principles and habits of those who were called Christians. In his well-known letter to his imperial master, whose instructions he solicited in the dilemma, he details some circumstances that afford a curious picture of the state of feeling prevalent both among the leading men and the populace of Rome towards the primitive believers. "I am at a loss," says he, "whether regard should be paid to difference of age,-whether the young and the weak should be treated more tenderly than the stronger and more advanced in years, -whether to allow time for recanting, -whether the name, unaccompanied with any other offences, or the crimes that are associated with the name, should be punished. Meanwhile, this has been my mode of procedure to those Christians that were brought before me:-I asked them, whether they were Christians? and if they confessed, I asked them again and again, holding up the terror of punishment; after which, if they were obstinate, I ordered them to immediate execution. For I did not entertain a doubt that their stubborn and inflexible obstinacy should meet condign punishment. More cases occurring, and the superstition continuing to spread, I fortunately procured a paper, containing the names of multitudes, some of whom voluntarily denied they had been Christians, or had ceased to be so. With a view to ascertain the truth of their statement, I commanded them to

invoke the gods, and present wine and incense to your statue, and, moreover, blaspheme Christ,—a dishonour which, it is alleged, no true Christians will ever do. I was satisfied, and dismissed them; and others of them, having at first acknowledged themselves Christians, afterwards denied it,—all of whom I proved by ordering them to render divine honours to the gods. To satisfy myself still farther, I apprehended two female slaves, who had been deaconesses in the Church, and having examined them by torture, all I could discover, by their evidence, respecting the conduct of the Christians, is, that on a stated day they are wont to assemble, before sunrise, to sing a hymn to Christ, as the God whom they worship; and bind themselves by an oath not to commit any wickedness, but to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery; to keep faith, and, when requested, to restore any pledge committed to them." It might have been expected, that, after such a discovery as Pliny had made, an amiable man, as he was, would have looked with an indulgent eye on a religion which prescribed such harmless practices,—and that, as an enlightened politician, he would have patronized, or thrown the shield of his protection over a people who voluntarily obliged themselves to act on such golden rules of morality; but his understanding was beclouded by the prejudices, and his conduct fettered by the laws, of the ancient and approved policy of Rome,—which tolerated no departure from the popular faith, and was jealous of all secret associations of men. And although he had found Bithynia, on his arrival, in a state of the most profound tranquillity, and the most loyal disposition towards the emperor,-although, among the vast body of people who had long made profession of Christianity in that province, his attention had not been directed towards a solitary instance of open disaffection, or secret sedition,-although even the renegade Christians, whom he examined by torture, to learn the habits

of that people, did not lay any crime to the charge of their former brethren,-yet, contrary to his natural temper and usual policy, he displayed towards the adherents of the new faith the utmost severity and intolerance.* Nay, he so far departed from the equity of the Roman laws, which always showed a regard to those who were of tender age, as to hesitate whether this clemency ought not to be dispensed with in the treatment of the Christians; some of whom he degraded, others he tortured, and all of whom, after they had been thrice interrogated if they were Christians, and persevered in the avowal, he put to instant death. The constancy and fidelity which in others would have commanded admiration, and been considered a virtue, was, in them, "detestable obstinacy," and punished as a crime. The subsequent administration of the proprætor was guided by the advice of the emperor, who ordered that the Christians should not be sought after, as ordinary criminals, by the police; but that, if any were accused and convicted, they should receive the punishment of death. In this rescript, which, in the absence of written law or precedent, furnished the only instruction and guide as to the treatment of Christians, there is a great appearance of clemency and moderation; but, in reality, it is one of the most cruel and unfavourable edicts ever issued concerning that people. † By means of it, indeed, the trade of informers, which had been so common in former reigns, was abolished, and the wretched slaves who had betrayed their Christian masters, were executed without mercy, as a warning to others; but the priests, who saw their influence daily on the wane,and the populace, who were reduced to beggary by having no sale for the victims, shrines, and other materials of ido'atry, were constantly dragging, in their moments of irritation, vast numbers of Christians to the tribunals of the governor; and, as his own

^{*} Epist. x.

[†] Le Clerc, A. cxi. N. 15.

testimony shows that no menaces could shake the constancy of a true Christian, his executioners had as much work as ever with the adherents of the new Besides, the public festivals were always occasions of annoyance and suffering to the Christians, as at those times there was much pomp observed in the celebration of religious ceremonies; and the zeal of the populace for their national worship was likely to acquire fresh stimulus amid the revelry of a sacred solemnity. Scarcely a year passed without some public demonstration in hono or of the emperor; and as these anniversaries were always hallowed by the rites of religion, and votive libations to his health, by which the people testified their loyalty, the Christians, who could neither participate in the sacrifices, nor bow to his statue, always found these to be seasons of grief rather than rejoicing. One memorable occasion of this kind occurred during the presidency of Pliny,the quindecennalia, or fifteenth anniversary of Trajan's accession, which was celebrated in 111, the year after he entered upon office. Among all ranks, the utmost enthusiasm of loyalty prevailed,—and though the Christians yielded to no class of their fellow-subjects in devoted attachment to their sovereign, and regularly prayed for his health, and prosperity to his government, their singularity in not joining in the public demonstrations of joy marked them out as objects of suspicion to the governor, and proved fatal to their peace,—the more so, that Pliny, being invested with the office of augur, was called to watch over the interests of the national faith, and besides participating in the natural feelings of the priests, and the undoubted sincerity of his attachment to the gods of his country, drew much of the splendour and emoluments of his office from the crowds of attendants in the temples and at the altars.

In other parts of the empire, it is probable that Trajan acted on the advice he gave to the governor of

Bithynia, not to be overcurious in detecting Christians, but to punish them if brought before him and convicted; and viewing, as he did, the religion of that people in a political point of view, as setting the laws at defiance, and bringing contempt on the most sacred and venerable institutions of the State, there can be little doubt, that in every quarter of his dominions the arm of imperial vengeance fell heavy on the followers of Jesus. In Palestine, for instance, it is said, that the governor having written to Trajan that he was weary with punishing Christians, and felt himself inadequate to the task of crushing their superstition, the emperor immediately put a stop to the farther effusion of blood. still, although he cannot be acquitted of cruel injustice and intolerance to the Christians, the fault is attributed not so much to the man as to the age, which had no enlightened views of toleration, and could perceive nothing but hidden dangers in a religion which required neither temples, images, nor altars; and although various parts of the world were, during this reign, infamous for the scenes of suffering to multitudes of excellent and holy men, whose Christianity was their only crime, yet it cannot be said of this emperor that he authorised any regular or determined attacks on the followers of Christ, like those that have rendered odious the memories of Nero and Domitian.

On the death of Trajan, which happened while he was engaged in the foreign wars that clouded the close of his reign, Hadrian, whom he had adopted, succeeded to the imperial throne. He was a prince of a strangely inconsistent character, and in whose life the most opposite virtues and vices were singularly blended. Among his characteristic peculiarities, he was passionately fond of magic, and an enthusiastic bigot for what Gibbon calls the elegant superstition of Greece,—in consequence of which he despised all other forms of religion that did not resemble his favourite mythology, and proved a determined enemy to Christianity, which

threatened to level it with the dust. He did not, indeed, issue any new edicts to check its progress, or authorise any rash acts of tyrannical oppression on its disciples; but, as he allowed the former laws of the empire regarding them to continue in force, the interested abettors of idolatry had ample opportunities of wreaking their vengeance, and stirring up an ignorant populace to demand the destruction of the hated enemies of the religion of their fathers. example gave the greatest encouragement to the persecutors of the Christians; for, while the inferior magistrates and others witnessed the zeal of their master in courting initiation into the most secret mysteries of the Grecian worship, they could not doubt of his determination to encourage the established religion, and of their liberty to oppress and extirpate all who were against it. During his various travels in the provinces, where his inquisitive mind made constant and anxious observations on the prevailing state and habits of religion, informations were frequently lodged with him against many who refused to sacrifice to the gods; and in the north of Italy and Gaul, several persons, who had been summoned to his presence, and avowed their invincible attachment to Christianity, were ordered to be put to death. On his return to Rome, where he celebrated a public festival with extraordinary magnificence, and signalized the occasion by laying the foundations of a temple and a country palace, many Christians in the metropolis suffered for not joining with the rest of the citizens in the imposing sacrifices and worship which as usual accompanied the dedication. Among these was Symphorosa, a widow of rank, who, with her seven sons, resolutely encountered martyrdom.* But it was principally in Asia, where vital Christianity still continued in a flourishing state, that the most determined and revolting acts of barbarity, if not authorised, yet connived

^{*} Tillemont Mem., tom. ii. part ii.

at by the emperor, were committed on the unfortunate adherents of the Gospel. As the trade of informer had become dangerous, and no single person would incur the risk of accusing the believers, the inventive malice of the priests had devised new methods of annoying them. One of these was, by the circulation of atrocious calumnies, to rouse the whole populace with one voice to demand the extirpation of the Christians; and many magistrates, with a view of courting popularity, or from some equally dishonourable motives, yielded to the clamours of the multitude, by exposing the Christians on the bloody sands of the amphitheatre. Some earnest remonstrances, forwarded by some of his confidential magistrates, seconded by some powerful apologies by the most eminent Christians, produced a sensation in the royal mind. The emperor was struck with these accounts of the innocence of the Christians; and induced by his characteristic love of justice, forthwith despatched orders to governors and magistrates in all parts of the empire, that no Christian should be punished except for some violation of the laws. This was the second imperial statute in favour of the Christians; and it was a vast improvement on the celebrated edict of Trajan, which enjoining only that Christians should not be hunted after, but still regarding their religion as a crime, could be interpreted with mildness or severity, according to the temper or views of the magistrate. But by the ordinance of Hadrian, a legal charge of having infringed on the laws of the state, required to be instituted and proved against a Christian, by his accusers personally confronting him in a court of justice, before he could be dealt with as a criminal; and the accusation, if false, was followed by the utmost severity of punishment. It was so far beneficial to the Christians, that it secured their protection from the effects of sudden and violent outrages, to which the bigoted devotees of idolatry had been easily stimulated against them,

as well as from the indiscreet facility of the magistrates in handing them over to the tender mercies of a mob. But as by its vague and ambiguous terms, it left undefined what was meant by a violation of the laws, it became a very uncertain and insufficient security to the Christians. And there were not wanting numbers unfriendly to their cause, who learned in a short time to turn the very edict into an engine of persecution, by considering the profession of the Christian faith as one of the offences which it contemplated as contrary to law. Accordingly, in this reign, a terrible persecution of the Christians was carried on,—the extent and fearful ravages of which may be judged of by the single circumstance, that when Arrius, a proconsul in Asia, had committed all sorts of outrages on the unhappy Christians of the capital, which was the seat of his government, the whole of them in a body surrounded his tribunal, voluntarily confessing their religion. Astonished at their numbers, he ordered a few of them to execution, and dismissing the rest, told them, that if they were bent on putting an end to their lives, they could find precipices and halters at home, without pressing on him to become their executioner. To such extremities was this persecution carried, that one of Hadrian's deputies wrote to him, earnestly beseeching his imperial permission to mitigate its severity. But although this request was granted, yet in many places the war of extermination was waged with unabated violence; and the reign of Hadrian must, in every history that details the sufferings of the primitive Christians, obtain a prominent place in the list of their persecutions.

Passing Antoninus Pius, who continued the same general policy towards the Christians as his predecessor Hadrian, we come to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, who jointly succeeded to the honours of the empire in 161. Although, during the earlier part of their administration, some indulgence was shown

to the followers of Christ, and professors of his religion were even allowed to hold office on terms with which they could conscientiously comply, yet it is beyond all doubt, that this period was not altogether unmarked by trouble and annoyance to them, which, owing to a great and alarming mortality which prevailed about four years after the accession, increased to all the severity of persecution,—the popular fury, as usual on such occasions, raging against the Christians as the guilty cause of the calamity, and demanding expiation by their blood. In Rome, and, of course, almost under the eye of the emperor, though he issued no penal edict against them, executions took place with impunity, and immense numbers were put to a cruel death, among whom was the celebrated Justin Martyr. But it was not in Rome alone that the condition of the Christians at this time was painfully trying. The extraordinary diffusion of the Gospel in the farthest regions of the world, and the multitudes of every name and of every rank who daily crowded to its standard, had roused the serious alarm of the friends and supporters of paganism, and scarcely ever did persecution attain such a height of violence, as when Marcus Aurelius presided over the destinies of the Roman world. As if a universal conspiracy had been formed, the most tremendous tumults simultaneously broke forth every where, and war was proclaimed against all who were eminent, or known, as Christians. The churches of Athens, Lyons, and Vienna, which boasted of a numerous body of members, were deprived of their pastors and their principal ornaments, and so greatly reduced as to be almost totally annihilated. In Laodicea, Smyrna, Sardis, and all the populous cities of Asia Minor, the same spirit of active hostility reigned. Not that any new decrees against the Christians had been issued, for the ancient laws of Trajan and Hadrian were still in force; but the philosophic emperor. though highly extolled for his humane disposition and

amiable character, entertained a profound contempt for the Christians, and though it is pretty certain that he had some knowledge of their principles and habits, yet the cold stern spirit of stoicism which pervaded his whole character, froze in his bosom the streams of admiration, which must otherwise have copiously flowed while he contemplated their numerous virtues. Moreover, his fond and often ridiculous partiality for the philosophers, in whose society he delighted to spend his hours of pastime and leisure, and with many of the most eminent of whom he maintained a constant correspondence, led him to give a credulous ear to the most vile and improbable insinuations which that learned and speculative body condescended to circulate to the prejudice of the Christians. Whether some of those companions of his favourite studies had obtained an express permission, or trusted for impunity to his well-tried friendship for their sect, certain it is, that by their instigation toleration was withdrawn from the Christians, and the united voices of the priests and people were vehemently raised for the destruction of the whole Christian name. The magistrates, though all other business was completely suspended, felt themselves unable to attend to the innumerable cases that were brought before their tribunals. The evidence of slaves, and the prejudiced testimony of the lowest rabble, was readily entertained by numbers of the governors and judges, whom fear or bribes had gained over, and the property of the condemned was given as a reward to the accusers. By holding forth such temptations to false witnesses, a prodigious impulse was given to the cause of persecution. Every Christian whose money or lands excited the cupidity of his envious neighbours, or whose virtuous presence overawed their fraudulent transactions in business, or whose removal might promise an accuser advancement to a lucrative office, or a more extended trade, was forthwith dragged before the public tribunals.

the usual interrogatory,-" Art thou a Christian?" he replied in the affirmative, as all true Christians did, no tedious formalities of justice were observed, from that moment his fate was sealed; and although the laws of former emperors, by which no Christian should be punished but for a violation of the institutions of the empire, were not rescinded, yet the joint influence of the philosophers and the priests carried every thing before them, - overpowered the feeble opposition of such of the provincial magistrates as showed a scrupulous regard to humanity and justice, and succeeded in deluging every city, and almost every hamlet, of the Roman world, with rivers of Christian blood. From some hints in the numerous Apologies which this troublous period called forth, it appears that new tests had been prepared, probably under a pretext of humanity, and to give a better colour to these sanguinary proceedings. It was proclaimed, for instance, that whoever would swear by the genius of the emperor, should, though he were an avowed Christian, be suffered to live unmolested. But this insidious oath was well known, by its original contrivers, to be of such a nature that the principles of Christians would not allow them to take it. Such were the trials to which, during the greater part of twenty years, the Christians were subjected; and though at intervals the appetite for Christian blood was allayed, being glutted with the very satiety of victims, yet it returned again with fresh vigour; for, as there were two reigning emperors, the religious propriety of the one, the triumphant arms of the other, and the frequent anniversaries held in honour of both, calling, at no distant periods, for a new celebration of festivities and games, were seasons which, on account of the idolatrous ceremonies that accompanied them, always proved fatal to the followers of Christ. In these widespread and prolonged troubles, multitudes fell of whom the world was not worthy-men who, though of little note in

the estimation of the world, had their record on high, —in the number of whom were the celebrated Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and Justin, sirnamed Martyr; the one, venerable for the sanctity of his personal character, and for being the last surviving contemporary of the apostles,—and the other, for combining the garb of a philosopher in happiest union with the humility of the saint. But neither the beauty of virtue nor the dignity of wisdom, could afford any protection, when allied with the odious profession of the Christian. And, oh! indelible stain on the boasted philosophy of man, intolerance never was more rampant than when one of her devoted disciples sat on the throne of the Roman world.

In the year 193, Septimius Severus became emperor -his craftiness and indefatigable activity, as well as the vigour of his arms, having obtained for him the victory over his numerous rivals. There is some reason to believe, that in the beginning of his reign, he was inclined to be favourable to the Christians, from the circumstance of his admitting into his palace a Christian slave, who had cured him of a lingering disorder, and his engaging a Christian nurse for his son; although it is probable that this kindly disposition proceeded more from a strong sense of personal gratitude, than from any good-will towards their religion. In a few years he completely altered his policy, and whatever was the cause of this change, whether his mind had become disaffected towards the followers of Christ, through the influence of his courtiers and favourite officers, whom he kept constantly around his person, or he had seen with alarm, during his foreign travels, the extraordinary increase of the new sect, and from the other competitors for the throne having been aided by formidable bodies of supporters, he was afraid the Christians might form a new party in the State,—certain it is that he published two severe edicts against them, the one prohibiting

all persons from embracing Christianity,* and the other making attendance on illegal meetings, such as the churches were, a criminal offence. These proclamations aimed at the gradual suppression of the obnoxious faith; and as they were viewed in that light by the governors of provinces, and the eagle-eyed heathens, this was the signal for the commencement of a persecution, which was then the more severely felt, from the considerable interval of repose the Christians had enjoyed between the death of Marcus Aurelius and the accession of Severus. The ancient enmity of the pagans, which, during the reign of the monster Commodus, and the political convulsions that followed his assassination, had yielded for a time to the stronger principle of self-preservation, immediately burst into a flame, and, in all parts of the world, raged with a vigour and inhumanity, that led the Christians of those days to imagine that the "perilous times" had come which marked the reign of Antichrist. The chief seat of the persecution was Alexandria, where Severus himself, during his residence in Egypt, having discovered a vast concourse of Christians, appointed first Lœtus, and afterwards Aquila, governors, whose violent

^{*} This edict included conversions to Judaism also. Speaking of this edict, Mosheim says,—" Severus did not enact any new laws against the Christians, nor did he command the extermination of that religion and its professors. All that he wished was the prevention of any farther increase of the Church, and ordered those to be punished who should revolt from the religion of their fathers to the Christian worship. They who, by birth, were Christians, and had become such previous to the publication of the edict, had no reason to apprehend danger from it. The ancient laws, indeed, particularly the celebrated edict of Trajan, which were still unrepealed, might cause them alarm. But on none who were Christians before the time of Constantine, p. 456. So says that learned historian; but it is quite evident that the emperor, by the heavy blow and great discouragement this edict gave to Christianity, contemplated the reduction of the Christian disciples, and their eventual extinction. And this view is placed beyond all doubt by the circumstance, that the publication was followed by an immediate and extensive persecution, which, if Severus had wished to show elemency to the Christians, he would have stopped.

[†] The reason assigned in the text was certainly one cause of the comparative security of the Christians in the reign of Commodus. But it is a singular fact, that the Christians owed their peace to the dishonourable influence of Marcia, his favourite mistress. This disgraceful woman professed Christianity, and, from whatever motives, was favourable to the Christians.

tempers led them to enter cordially into the views of their master, and who, being left to follow their discretion by the return of the emperor to Rome, committed the most dreadful havoc on the church of that city. Among the most eminent who suffered for their religion, was Leonidas, the father of Origen, whose zeal and attachment to the Gospel being invincible by menace or torture, procured him the distinction of being thrown into the strongest and most loathsome dungeon of Alexandria. In that abode of wretchedness, he was refreshed by the high Christian spirit of his youthful son, who contrived to convey to him a letter in these brief but emphatic words, "Take care and do not change your mind on our account." A few hours after receipt of this wonderful expression of Christian devotion, Leonidas was summoned for execution; and in company of a great number of his believing fellow-citizens, laid down his life rather than abjure the Gospel. The fate of the survivors was scarcely, if at all, milder than that of the martyrs. Their honours forfeited, their property confiscated, and themselves reduced to a state of beggary, they were often indebted for a miserable subsistence to the clandestine bounty of their friends. This was the case with Origen, who, though only seventeen years of age, had already braved all the terrors of martyrdom by the powerful and manly avowal of his faith, and was, together with a numerous family of brothers and sisters, preserved from absolute starvation only by the kindness of a lady of fortune. The famous Christian school of Alexandria was ruined; and Clement, who was its principal teacher and ornament, fled from the storm into the remote province of Cappadocia. place was immediately taken by the undaunted Origen, whose escape, as he was extremely obnoxious to the heathen populace, was sometimes almost miraculous. He visited the martyrs in prison, and paid the most assiduous attentions to all who suffered for the sake

of Christianity, whether they were acquaintances or strangers. He had even courage to continue these assiduities to them after sentence of condemnation had been pronounced on them; attended them to the place of execution; saluted them with the kiss of peace—the solemn token of Christian affection, and was sometimes nearly stoned to death on his return from the scenes of martyrdom. On one occasion, it is said, that he was forced to stand at the threshold of the temple of Serapis, with his head shaved and uncovered, and to present palm-branches to the worshippers as they entered; but he defended himself, the legend continues, by the constant repetition in secret of the name of Christ. The story is probably apocryphal; but there is no doubt, that his irrepressible zeal, often unnecessarily and uncautiously displayed, exposed him to daily hazards; and the wonder is, that a person of his eminent character and extensive influence preserved his life amid dangers which, on every side, were thinning the ranks of the Christians.* "One of his scholars, called Plutarch, was led to martyrdom. Origen accompanied him to the place of execution. The odium of the scholar's sufferings reflected on the master, and it was not without a peculiar providence that he escaped the vengeance of the citizens. After him Serenus suffered by firethe third martyr was Heraclides—the fourth Heron. The former had not yet been baptized, being in the ranks of the catechumens, the latter had been recently baptized, but both were beheaded. A second Serenus, of the same school, having sustained great torments and much pain, was beheaded. Patamidna, a young

^{*} At the time of his father's death, Origen vehemently courted the honour of a martyr's death. He was then, though but a very young man, never absent from the trial and executions of the Christian sufferers, whose fate he envied, and did every thing to procure his own substitution in their place. His mother employed threats, entreaties, and tears. in vain; and when she saw that nothing else would do, but he would suffer with his ffather and other Christian relatives, she exerted an unusual degree of maternal authority,—confined him to the house, and concealed from him his dress.

woman, remarkable for her beauty, purity of mind, and firmness in the faith, suffered very dreadful torments; she was scourged very severely by the order of Aquila, the judge, who threatened to deliver her to be abused by the basest characters. But she remained firm in the faith, was led to the fire, and burned, together with her mother, Marcella. The heart of Basilides, a soldier, who presided at her execution, was softened. He pitied her, treated her courteously, and protected her, so far as he durst, from the insolence of the mob. She acknowledged his kindness, thanked him, and promised that, after her departure, she would entreat the Lord for him. Scalding pitch was poured over her whole body, which she sustained with astonishing patience. Some time after, Basilides being required by his fellow-soldiers to swear profanely on a certain occasion, he refused, and professed himself a Christian. They dishelieved him at first, but finding him serious, they forthwith carried him to the judge, who threw him into prison, where he was visited by multitudes of sympathizing Christians, till he proved his sincerity by martyrdom." *

From Alexandria, the persecution spread over the northern parts of Africa, and the flourishing church of Carthage soon witnessed the same scenes of horror that had been perpetrated among the brethren in the capital of Egypt. The governor of Proconsular-Africa at that time was Saturninus, on whom the infamy rests of being the first in that quarter of the world to put Christians to death; and he made it evident that he did not understand the edict of Severus as meant only to prevent any new conversions from the ranks of idolatry to the Gospel, as he commenced and superintended a persecution against Christians of all ages and conditions, whether they had been trained to that religion from their birth or not. The proceedings were characterised by the most revolting barbarities.

A succession of proconsuls, each surpassing his predecessor in the intensity of his hatred to the Christians, dved the shores of Africa with the blood of martyrs, and in their rude and unfeeling treatment of some believers of venerable age and tender sex, occasioned scenes of the most painfully interesting nature to be found in the records of the Church. It is sufficient simply to mention here the names of Felicitas and Perpetua, and their companions in death, as a more extended notice of their Christian fortitude and meekness will be given in a subsequent part of this volume. Nor were these calamitous events confined to that remote province. In Antioch, where the prohibitory edict of Severus originated, -in Lyons, the recent scene of former barbarities, and where Irenæus, the bishop, with many of his flock, now perished in the most miserable manner, -and in various other places, the situation of the Christians was to the last degree afflicting. Rome itself, which, for a long time, knew of the persecution only by the rumour of distant disasters, at last, owing to some events of interest to the imperial family, felt all the severity of the war against the Church. The year 203 happened to be the tenth anniversary of Severus' accession; and as the same period was rendered memorable by the celebration of a triumph for the emperor's victories in the East, and for the marriage of his eldest son, Caracalla, frequent demonstrations of public rejoicing took place, which were attended with more than usual outbursts of popular fury against the Christians. These insults were renewed with increased malignity and bitterness a few weeks after, at the celebration of the secular games, which, although the ordinary period of one hundred years was not expired, the emperor resolved, contrary to all precedent, to hold. At these games, the national rites were performed with overpowering pomp. The priests and ministers of idolatry exhausted their powers of invention to vary the spectacles for the

gratification of the populace; and as the conscientious scruples of the Christians forbade them even to sanction with their presence the riotous and obscene exhibitions which occurred at the carnival, the offended multitude broke into their houses, pillaged their effects, and, dragging them to the public streets, committed the most lawless outrages on those whom they could not induce, by force or persuasion, to bear a part in the mummeries of superstition. These intolerable trials gave rise to a new expedient, which, though they chiefly resorted to it in the hope of procuring a mitigation of their sufferings, and toleration for their religion, eventually proved the unhappy cause of increasing and prolonging the persecution. This was the practice of purchasing, by a yearly or monthly tribute to the magistrate of the bounds, the privilege of protection to their persons, and indulgence in the exercise of their worship; and not content with this, some, wearied with extremity of suffering, even went so far as to give occasional hush-money to soldiers and informers,—preferring to give their goods in this way, in the hope of insuring a little respite, to leaving their families to be plundered, and their lives in continual jeopardy. The most eminent men of that day in the Christian Church, with few exceptions, sanctioned these measures by their approval; nor, though it does seem to cast a slight shade on the honour of the Christian name, should we apply the rules of too severe a judgment to a proceeding which many sincere, but timid believers, might have adopted to secure the unmolested privilege and comforts of their faith. But it was soon felt, to their bitter disappointment, to be an occasion of adding sorrow upon sorrow. The cupidity of their oppressors was set on edge, and ever and anon rumours of new laws were circulated—fresh measures of rapacity were invented, to extort money from the wretched caste of Christians. Governors of provinces and others, anxious to improve their fortune during the

brief term of their administration, levied heavy contributions on that people; and although, for the honour of humanity, it must be mentioned that there were some noble exceptions, yet the great majority of the magistrates were cruel and rapacious tyrants, who abused their official power to the purposes of personal aggrandisement, and whose more open oppressions were seconded by those of numerous bands of ruffians in every city, whose means of subsistence were solely derived from the secret supplies they exacted for suppressing their calumnies and lies. The Christians continued in this state of grievous oppression during the whole reign of Severus; and after his death, which took place at York in the year 211, his son and successor, Caracalla, being a man of the most unnatural severity of temper, continued the same hostile policy towards them. He did not, indeed, commence any new persecution, and was, from his early recollections of his nurse, rather favourably inclined than otherwise towards the followers of Christ; but he allowed the old laws against them to remain in force—magistrates were, as usual, left to their own discretion as to the mild or rigorous interpretation of them. If a few, yielding to the voice of humanity, dismissed the accusations, and showed clemency and protection to the professors of the new religion, the great majority, participating in the popular enmity, or from sordid and rapacious motives, executed the law to the very letter; and from the interesting dialogue of Minucius Felix, an eminent Christian lawyer of Rome, as well as from the no less interesting letter of Tertullian to Scapula, governor of Africa, it is but too certain, that during the reign of Caracalla, the sword, though not authorised by the emperor, dealt terrible execution every where on the unhappy Christians.

CHAPTER II.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

PERSECUTION BY MAXIMINUS OF THRACE-BY DECIUS-COURT OF INQUI-SITION-SAFETY SOUGHT BY FLIGHT, AND INDULGENCE PURCHASED BY SOME WITH MONEY-LETTER OF DIONYSIUS-MARTYRDOM OF JULIAN-TRIAL OF DIOSCARUS-SINGULAR FATE OF NUMIDICUS-WOMAN FORCED TO SACRIFICE BY HER HUSBAND-SEVERE SUFFERINGS BY THE MINIS-TERS-CYPRIAN PROSCRIPED-HIS FLIGHT-CHÆREMON CAPTURED BY THE SARACENS-PAUL - THE FIRST HERMIT - TRAGI-COMIC FATE OF DIONYSIUS-UNHAPPY CONSEQUENCES OF THE DECIAN PERSECUTION-SHORT BUT PERSECUTING REIGN OF GALLUS-VALERIAN-INFLUENCE OF THE ASTROLOGER MACRIANUS EXERTED AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS-VALERIAN BANISHES THE BISHOPS-GREAT ACTIVITY AND SUCCESS IN THEIR EXILE-LABOURS OF CYPRIAN AND DIONYSIUS-PUBLICATION OF NEW AND SEVERER EDICT - SEVERITIES AT ROME - MARTYRDOM OF SEXTUS IN A CEMETERY, AND OF CYPRIAN AT CARTHAGE-DEATH OF VALERIAN, AND TRANQUILLITY OF THE CHURCH-ITS GROWING NUMBERS. BUT DECLINE IN PIETY-BEGINNING OF DIOCLETIAN'S PERSECUTION-AUGURIES-RESIGNATION OF MULTITUDES OF SOLDIERS-MARCELLUS-SAVAGE DISPOSITION OF GALERIUS-HERESIES OF THE MANICHEES-ENTERTAINMENTS OF ROMULA-CHURCHES DEMOLISHED - SCRIPTURES BURNT-INDISCREET ZEAL AND SEVERE PUNISHMENT OF A CHRISTIAN-BARBARITIES IN THE PALACE-IN NUMIDIA-ROME-ANTIOCH-CASE OF ROMANUS-SEARCHING FOR SCRIPTURES - CONCEALMENT OF THEM -READERS-FATE OF ONE IN NUMIDIA, AND OF FELIX-INDISCRETION OF SOME CHRISTIANS-COWARDICE OF OTHERS-BARBARITIES OF MAXIMIN -CASE OF APPHIAN-AGAPIUS FIGHTING WITH A BEAR-MILDER EDICT OF GALERIUS-ARTFUL POLICY OF MAXIMIN.

Things continued in tolerable tranquillity with the Christians from the death of Caracalla till the year 235, when the destinies of the empire were committed to the hands of Maximinus. This man, who had

been born and bred in Thracia, advanced himself, by his boldness and physical powers, through the successive stages of a shepherd, of a highway robber, and a soldier in the ranks, to the dignity of the imperial throne. In strength and stature he was of Herculean growth, and his whole appearance and bearing was that of one totally destitute of education, and rough as the rugged mountains on which he was nursed. Seldom has a greater monster appeared in the garb of humanity. Relying on his extraordinary muscular powers, he committed the most lawless outrages-destroying men, or plundering their houses, with equal indifference, especially all those who were acquainted with the manner of his birth, or who threatened to stand in the way of his insatiable ambition. Having assassinated his master, he usurped the empire, through the aid of the soldiers, whom he had gained over to his interests, and from the moment that he felt himself possessed of the power, he governed on his favourite maxim,—that mankind were not to be made to obey but by cruelty. The Christians, of course, could not escape the vengeance of this brutal tyrant; and, as if he had determined that his policy towards them should in all respects be diametrically opposite to that of his excellent predecessor, Alexander Severus, in whose household many Christians had found a paternal asylum, and whose patronage raised numbers of them to official dignities, he directed the whole weight of his fury against the ministers and members of the Church, as the chief abettors and support of Christianity. A fierce crusade was commenced in every province against them, by the force of which, multitudes of the most eminent Christians were driven, houseless and unprovided wanderers, abroad on the world, and suffered the most dreadful extremities of cold, hunger, and fatigue. Being not allowed to appear in cities or in the public haunts of society, they were reduced to the cruel ne-

cessity of passing their days on solitary mountains, and their nights in dens and caves of the earth, deriving a poor and precarious subsistence from the occasional bounty of their friends that dared to approach them, or from the raw and unwholesome roots of the earth. In Asia Minor, some alarming earthquakes, that were attended with great destruction of life and property, increased the violence of the persecution. Among the most conspicuous of the sufferers, though they were not put to death, were Ambrose and Origen—the latter of whom sought safety in concealment. Happily, the kindness of Providence limited the tyrant's reign to the brief period of three years—a period sufficiently long, however, to have witnessed the ranks of the Christians undergoing a melancholy diminution; and although it is certain, that no class of his subjects was exempt from the capricious cruelties of Maximinus, the Christians in this reign, as usual, were singled out as especial victims in the list of those whom the tyrant proscribed and devoted to destruction.

After the death of Maximinus, the trials of the Christians, which for a while had been forgotten during a ten, or, as in some churches, a thirty years' enjoyment of tranquillity and peace, were renewed with unprecedented violence, on Decius acquiring possession of the empire. His accession took place in the year 249, and as the persecution against the Christians was almost the first act of his government, it is not improbable that his advancement to the imperial dignity was promoted by the zeal and successful manœuvres of the Pagans, who, seeing the disciples of Jesus flourishing under the patronage and protection of Philip, the reigning emperor, were painfully convinced that there was no hope of reducing their numbers and exterminating their religion, except by elevating a devoted worshipper of the gods to the post of government. Never could man have been found fitter for their purpose than Decius, who, to a most bigoted

attachment to idolatry, added the stern and inflexible maintenance of the Roman policy, that the old religion was a fundamental part of the constitution, and should be upheld against all attempts at inno-Accordingly, while most of his persecuting predecessors, after the time of Trajan, only connived at the outrages committed on the Christians, and contented themselves with the old laws-which provided for those who professed the Gospel various means of escape,—this emperor directed his whole energies to the devising of measures, which would most effectually crush it, and leave not a single adherent of the Christian faith within the limits of the Roman empire. In the beginning of the year 250, he issued an edict, that an inquiry should be made into the state of the established religion, and that all persons should be obliged to celebrate divine worship according to the rites of idolatry. The tyrannical mandate was sent to all parts of the world; and governors and magistrates were enjoined, on the severest penalties for disobedience, to see it faithfully and rigorously carried into execution. With a view to this, a court was held in every district, consisting of the magistrates and five of the principal inhabitants, before whom, all who were suspected of not observing the religious institutions of the empire, and of having embraced Christianity, were summoned to appear. This local board, invested with all the powers, and with an equal share of the wily and infernal arts of the Star-Chamber in England, or the Inquisition in Spain, inquired into the religious opinions and practices of every individual within their bounds. A certain form of interrogatories was drawn up—the chief of which were, whether the persons accused were in the habit of frequenting the temples, and were disposed to reverence the faith of their ancestors? If they answered in the affirmative, they were forthwith desired to prove the sincerity of their answers, by swearing by the name of Jupiter, and sacrificing,

after which they were dismissed with honour and applause. If the reply was of a contrary nature, they were offered the alternative of abjuring the religion of Christ, or undergoing a course of the most rigorous punishment. There was no possibility of escape from the searching inquirers; and although the full vengeance of the edict was aimed at the bishops and leaders of the Church, whose presence and example it was thought were a great encouragement to mislead the people, and on whom sentence of death was pronounced the moment they hesitated about giving a ready and full recantation, yet all classes of Christians were included in the list of the proscribed, and proceeded against with unrelenting severity, if they refused to comply with the rites of the State religion. Stern as was the procedure of this court of inquisition, it was at first intended that they should confine themselves to the infliction of lighter punishments, and try the effects of persuasions, commands, and threats, before they pushed matters to extremity; when they found the multitudes of Christians so much greater, and the spirit of many of them so much more determined, than they had any idea of, they gradually advanced to greater severity, till every one who showed symptoms of obstinacy, as it was called, -that is, of immovable attachment to the Christian worship, was subjected to a variety of tortures. Many, when served with a summons to compear before the court to undergo examination, took fright, and before the day arrived, fled from the country, in consequence of which they were immediately outlawed, their property confiscated, and themselves forbidden to return, under penalty of death. But, in every place, great numbers, who were unwilling to part with their possessions, and who could not bear the idea of going into voluntary exile, resolved to abide the consequences of an examination by this dread tribunal—and to take their chance of braving the more searching inquiries,

or in some way softening the disposition of the inquisitors. The latter expedient of giving money or secret bribes to the more avaricious magistrates, which was fallen upon by some, whose courage failed them at the sight of the torture, unhappily became too general; and numbers of Christians flattered themselves, that they incurred the guilt neither of sacrifice nor throwing incense on the pagan altars, but retained their faith inviolate, when they allowed a certificate to be publicly shown, stating, that they had obeyed the edict, or procured the insertion of their names in the public register, along with those who had actually complied with the mandate of the emperor. But the sincere and worthy believers shrunk from so mean and questionable a way of preserving their personal safety, and magnanimously professing themselves Christians, they were, in order to shake their resolution, subjected to a variety of tortures, after which they were thrown into prison, where cold, hunger, and solitary confinement were left to do the work of bringing about either their recantation or their death. The most deplorable consequences every where followed these rigorous proceedings-of which some idea may be formed from the letter of a contemporary writer, Dionysius, bishop "All were overwhelmed," says he, of Alexandria. " with dismay. Many of the most eminent amongst us, through fear, presented themselves at the first summons; others employed in public business were forced to appear in virtue of their offices; and others were dragged before the heathen tribunals by their friends and relatives. Diverse was the behaviour of those who, as they were cited by name, went up to the impure and unhallowed sacrifices. Some appeared pale and trembling, as if they themselves, instead of sacrificing unto the idols, had been about to be sacrificed, insomuch that they were scoffed at by the surrounding multitude, as men who were evidently afraid either to sacrifice or to die. But others ran hastily forward

to the altars, affirming boldly that they had never been Christians,-of whom it was most truly said before by our Lord, 'that such men should hardly be saved.' Of the rest, some imitated the examples already described—some fled, others were seized. those who were seized, some, either immediately or after certain days, without having been brought to trial, abjured, and others, by force of torture, renounced the faith. But the firm and blessed pillars of our Lord having been strengthened by Him, and having received might and fortitude, according to the mighty power of faith that was in them, became the admirable witnesses of the kingdom, -among these was Julian, who, suffering from the gout, and unable to stand or walk, was borne to the place of trial by the other Christians, -one of whom instantly apostatized, but the others, with Julian, avowed their faith in the Lord; and they were conducted on camels throughout the whole streets of the city, openly scourged, and at length, in presence of the multitude, burnt to death. A soldier, who was one of the bystanders at the martyrdom of Julian and his companion, endeavoured to stop the insults of the multitude. But the mob cried out, 'Away with him also to the judgment-seat,' - and this most courageous champion of the Lord, having quitted himself manfully in the great combat for the cause of piety, was beheaded. Conspicuous among the Alexandrian Christians, who on this occasion witnessed a good confession, was Dioscarus, a young lad of fourteen years of age. governor imagining this youth to be gentle and pliable, tried, by fair speeches, to ensnare him and get him to sacrifice. But Dioscarus resisted all his arts of persuasion, and although, to intimidate him, he scourged several older Christians in his presence in the most savage manner, and some, who were very persevering in the faith, he committed to the flames, yet none of these things could move Dioscarus, who eminently

distinguished himself in sight of the whole concourse of spectators, answering mildly but firmly to every question, so that the governor was astonished, and said, 'In respect of thy youth, I will allow thee farther time for amendment, and dismissed him."* In other places, there were exhibitions of Christian courage and fidelity to the cause of Christ no less admirable than those at Alexandria. Numidicus, an office-bearer in the church of Cyprian, at Carthage, may be mentioned, for the singularity of the circumstances attending his martyrdom. He had braved every personal danger, in his benevolent anxiety to encourage and strengthen the faith of others. He had seen his own wife seal her testimony on the funeral pile; and, having thus distinguished himself as a most zealous believer, he was soon after condemned to be consumed with fire. As he was the last of a great multitude who that day had become glorious witnesses for the truth, the multitude, weary with blood, overwhelmed him with stones when half burnt, and then left him for dead. His sorrowing daughter, who had been lingering near the scene of execution, to collect the ashes of her venerable parent, found him half buried under a heap of rubbish; and, while she was prosecuting her filial task of arranging the body for a decent interment, was surprised and gladdened with apparent signs of life in the mangled corpse. By the tender assiduities of the daughter, her martyred father was, through the blessing of God, restored to her affections, and survived for a considerable time, to be the honoured instrument of solacing and strengthening the minds of his distracted brethren, in those times when "men's hearts were failing them for fear." Another incident, which happened about the same period with the condemnation of Numidicus, is too remarkable to be omitted. A woman was dragged, by her unfeeling

^{*} Letter of Dionysius; Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. ii. p. 9.

husband, to the altar, where he publicly attempted to force her to sacrifice, by violently guiding her hands. The wife was too strong in the faith, and had too great a horror of touching the unclean thing, to continue silent; she cried with the most vehement gestures, "I did it not-I did it not;" and forthwith, as an incorrigible Christian, was sentenced to banishment.* It would be easy, from the interesting records of Christian antiquity, to swell the number of these anecdotes, and to relate, in tales that would harrow up the inmost feelings of the reader, the cold-blooded cruelties that were perpetrated by the agents of the Decian persecution,—the shortest, but the severest of any that the Christians had hitherto been exposed to. Not a place, where adherents of the Christian faith were to be found, but had its court of inquisition, its ministers, or rather executioners, of justice,—its apparatus of torture and death,—its sad spectacles of old men and women, young men and maidens, people both of high and low degree, losing their lives amid the most appalling sufferings, because they could not blaspheme the name of God and the Saviour. "It would be easier," says an eminent writer, "to count the sands of the sea shore, than to reckon up all the martyrs that felt the weight of this persecution,—not to say any thing of those incredible numbers of confessors that were beaten, imprisoned, tormented,nor of the far greater number of those who betook themselves to a voluntary exile, choosing rather to commit themselves to the barrenness of rocks and mountains, and the mercy of wild beasts, than to those who trampled so cruelly on all the laws of nature and humanity."† But it was on the heads of the bishops the vengeance of Decius fell most heavily. From the first outbreak of this persecution, the most positive orders were issued that the office-bearers of the Church should be hunted out; and that, on every individual

^{*} Cyprian, Epist. 18.

[†] Nicephorus, Book v. ch. 26.

of that order who was convicted, sentence of death should be passed without mercy. Many of the most eminent and inflexible ended their days on the cross or the pile, almost as soon as they were apprehended; and others, of whose pliable dispositions some hopes were entertained, were thrown into prison, where, amid the cold damps and burning heats to which they were alternately subjected, and the parching and scanty diet appointed them, in order to produce the pangs of hunger and thirst, they fell victims in a few days to severity of treatment. Some withdrew, while the storm was raging, to a place of concealment, not from a mean and cowardly apprehension of danger, but for the benevolent motive of securing immediate tranquillity to the Christian people, who suffered mainly by their presence; and continued from their retreat to send, from time to time, letters of consolation and encouragement, by the hands of trusty messengers, to the beloved flock that were mourning their temporary absence.* In the number of the latter was the famous Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who, on account of his pastoral activity, and prodigious influence, was publicly proclaimed in the list of the proscribed, a price set upon his head, and every one prohibited from harbouring his person and concealing his goods, which were publicly sold in the market. The hostile measures of the emperor were vehemently seconded by the multitude, who frequently demanded, at their public spectacles and games, that Cyprian should be thrown to the lions. In these circumstances, dreading lest, by his bold defiance of the proclamation against him, he might provoke the greater vengeance of imperial fury on his unoffending flock, and being especially admonished, as he says, in a dream, by God, he thought it prudent to retire for a while, till the violence of the persecution should abate. The same spirit of indefatigable activity and zeal which had distinguished

his ministry, gave him no time to weary in his solitude, whence he despatched no less than thirty-eight letters, full of the most faithful councils, the warmest encouragements to the stedfast, the most pointed reproofs to the wavering, and the most fervent prayers for the best interests of all. The bishops and leading members of the Church in Egypt pursued the same course as Cyprian,-by withdrawing from their posts during the fierce heat of the Decian troubles. Among these were several persons whose character and fate entitle them to a special notice. One was Chæremon, Bishop of Nilopolis, who fled with his wife to the mountains; * among which, and in the adjoining deserts by which the Eastern frontier of Egypt is skirted, he continued till, in common with a great number of illustrious exiles, he was carried off by the hordes of Saracen robbers, who then for the first time figure in history. † Multitudes, indeed, who sought an asylum in the woods and mountains, encountered death in more appalling forms than even those they sought to escape,-pining under the most painful privations of hunger and thirst,—starved with cold, oppressed with malignant diseases, which their miserable state of life had produced,—and preyed upon by ravenous beasts, or captured by lawless banditti, and carried into servitude more wretched by far than death itself. Another was Paul, a young man scarcely arrived at the age of puberty, and who, having been left a large fortune by his parents, retired, to escape the consequences of his Christian profession,—the loss of liberty, property, and life,—to the Egyptian deserts, where, in a spacious cavern on the side of a mountain, he established his residence; and becoming, from long habit, enamoured of a solitary condition, set to the hermits of after ages the first example of a mortified and monastic life. ‡ A third was Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, who, as well from his presiding over

^{*} Euseb. Hist. Eccles., vi. 42. † Ibid., i. 42. ‡ Cave's Lives.

the largest and most flourishing church in the world, as from his own personal eminence, was an especial object of the emperor's hatred, and suffered severely in the general calamity, although the good providence of God preserved a person of so much usefulness from the premature fate of martyrdom. An episode in his history, connected with the troublous period of the Decian persecution, may, by its tragi-comic nature, relieve the painful interest of these anecdotes. strict and particular were the instructions sent to Sabinus, the governor of Egypt, to apprehend and dispose of the bishop, that, without a moment's delay, he despatched an officer to surprise him, before any suspicion of immediate danger had alarmed the church for the safety of their beloved pastor. The messenger never dreaming that at such a time of uncertainty and trouble, when almost all the ministers of the Christians had betaken themselves to flight, Dionysius would be quietly residing at home, waylaid every place, and searched every corner of the city in vain except the house which the bishop and his family inhabited. Four days had he remained there, awaiting the fate which he thought was inevitable, till at length, vielding to the importunate entreaties of his friends, he left the place, accompanied by a few of his Christian friends and favourite domestics, to consult their safety in a distant land. They had not proceeded far in their midnight expedition when they were overtaken by a military party, who, as usual, were prowling the country to seize all Christian fugitives they could meet with; and having discovered what a valuable prize they had in their prisoner, led him under a strong escort to the nearest centurion, who, with his five inquisitorial colleagues, soon passed on the bishop a sentence of death, and ordered him to be conveyed to a little seaport, at a short distance from Alexandria, to prevent any popular tumult which the death of so eminent a man might occasion. It hap-

pened, that while the military guard were conducting their prisoner to the scene of execution, they were met by a man on his way to a marriage feast, who learning, to his deep sorrow, the name and the fate of Dionysius, told the sad story to the marriage company on his arrival. The mournful intelligence threw a gloom over every guest, and at length, fortifying themselves with wine, they, with one consent, rushed out of the house, entered the town, and uttering the most vociferous yells, attacked the doors of the cell where Dionysius was confined till the morning. The soldiers on guard, hearing the clamour of many voices, were panic-struck, and betaking themselves to flight, left their prisoner in the hands of the assailants, who, having gained access to the chamber, found the good man in his bed, enjoying a tranquil slumber, as if nothing more than ordinary was to befall him on the ensuing day. Being thus suddenly awakened, and finding himself surrounded by a body of armed men, he concluded they were robbers, and handing them his clothes, that were lying beside him, bade them take what little money they could find. Without disclosing their intentions, they commanded him peremptorily to rise and accompany them; and while he was remonstrating with them, and beseeching them in the most importunate manner not to embitter the few hours he had yet to live, two of them approaching his bed, laid hold on him, and dragging him to the door, disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as they had come into his presence. His fellowprisoners, however, who had been apprised of the stratagem, found him in the fields adjoining his late prison, and after offering a short but united expression of thanksgiving for so strange a deliverance, placed him on an ass, and withdrew with him to the deserts of Egypt, where they remained till this sad season of trial to the Christians was over, and happier times restored Dionysius and other exiled bishops to the communion of their brethren, and the privileges of Christian worship in their respective churches in all parts of the world.* The persecution of Decius lasted not much above two years; but the sad and withering effects it produced on the society of Christians were felt for many years after. Former persecutions had greatly reduced their ranks by the martyrdom of some, the dispersion of others, and the defection of not a few, whose courage failed them in the day of severe trial. But these ravages, great and mournful though they were, the rapid extension of the Christian cause in a short time repaired, and a respite of a few years found those churches which had been the greatest sufferers, boasting of a larger accession to their numbers, and flourishing more than ever. But a returning season of tranquillity and peace could not so easily remove the unhappy consequences of the persecution of Decius. Although on his death the sound of war ceased without, and against the Church, the spirit of bitter discord had been roused within, and the Christians found their communion, on the termination of this disastrous period, not only sadly thinned by the death or apostasy of multitudes who had once borne the name of Jesus, but distracted by many painful causes of contention among themselves, arising out of the doubtful or criminal conduct of those who, by real or pretended compliance with the rites of idolatry, had purchased exemption from the imperial vengeance. Perhaps no subject of controversy was debated with greater keenness, or produced more bitter animosity, than that which related to the proper treatment of those who had lapsed in the Decian persecution.

Decius being killed in a battle with the Goths, the empire fell into the hands of Gallus, who, along with the throne, inherited the enmity of his predecessor towards the Christians. At the close of the year 252,

^{*} Cave's Lives.

the persecution, begun in the former reign, and which had never altogether ceased, although its authors had grown weary with slaughter, and their passions had cooled, broke out with redoubled violence on the occasion of a pestilence which was then beginning to rage, and continued for fifteen months to commit the most terrible ravages.* The guilt of these visitations was, as usual, laid at the door of the Christians, and the emperor issued an edict, commanding all ranks of his subjects to make extraordinary sacrifices to the gods, in order that, by such tokens of devotion, they might be prevailed on to withdraw so fatal a scourge. The determined refusal of the Christians to comply with the prescribed acts of idolatry, was not, in the agitated state of the public mind, observed with indifference; and accordingly, they were again doomed to severe sufferings, multitudes both of old and young being slain and burnt in various parts of the empire, as a hecatomb of expiation to remove the anger of the gods. The reign of Gallus was short; and the civil disturbances that followed, procured a respite to the Christians, which lasted till Valerian was crowned emperor in 254. This person, who ascended the throne at a very advanced age, was, in the beginning of his reign, most favourably disposed towards the Christians, gave them the benefit of his patronage, introduced them into his family, and into the highest offices of government, in such numbers, that his court almost resembled a church.† But this happy season—the brightest which the friends of Christianity had ever seen under any of the Roman emperors—proved like a transient gleam of sunshine in a stormy day. Through the insidious counsels of Macrianus, an Egyptian astrologer, and a great encourager of the arts of magic, Valerian was persuaded to change his policy towards the Christians, to discourage and suppress their religion, and revive, with all the influence

^{*} Eusebius, vii. 1; Cyprian, Epist. 55.

and example of the court, the almost obsolete rites of Gentile worship. The juggling priests, who, of course, were most active promoters of the new measures, put in requisition every engine for inflaming the popular mind against the Christian doctrine, and gaining it over to their own side by an endless diversity of public amusements and splendid shows. Proceeding on the views of Decius, that the removal of the pastors, who possessed so much influence over their flocks, and the prohibition of all meetings in the churches and the cemeteries, would lead to the speedy decline of the cause of Jesus, they adopted at first the bloodless policy of banishing the bishops. Orders were sent to all the provinces, that the rulers of the Christian churches should be sought for, and universally condemned to exile; and with such malignant pleasure and alacrity was the mandate transmitted all over the empire, that in a few months there was not an assembly of Christians which had not to mourn the hopeless absence of its pastors and teachers. But the authors of this deep stroke of policy were grievously disappointed at its want of success; the pastors, though absent in the body, were present in spirit with their beloved flocks. A constant intercourse, secretly maintained by letters, or through the kind offices of Christian travellers, lessened the pain and disadvantages of local separation; and by the war interest and pious exhortations of the venerated exiles, they were as zealous and faithful in watching over their spiritual concerns, and retained as strong a hold on their affections, as if they were still present in the midst of their people.* Moreover, as they found it impossible to cease the exercise of their ministerial gifts while life and strength remained, they diligently sowed the seed of the Word in the solitudes whither they were removed. Congregations gradually gathered around them, and in many quarters where the joy-

^{*} Cyprian, Epist. 76.

ful sound had never previously been heard, the zeal and devotion of these banished ministers was gladdened with the society of a people " made ready for the Lord." Thus acted Cyprian of Carthage in his lonely exile at Curubis,* and thus laboured Dionysius of Alexandria in the Libyan solitudes of Cephron.† "When we began to address ourselves to the benighted inhabitants," writes the pious bishop, "we were at first persecuted and stoned, none would hear us patiently, but we persevered in the strength of the Lord, and ere long not a few of the heathen turned from idols and served the living God." # Thus was verified the well-known observation of Luther, that the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. Thus did God make the wrath of man to praise him, and turn the counsels of the Roman Ahithophels into foolishness.

Disappointed in their sanguine hopes of crushing Christianity, by breaking the connection between the pastors and their flocks, Valerian and his advisers resolved on more rigorous proceedings—a change of policy which was publicly announced the year following by this edict: "All bishops, priests, and deacons, shall forthwith be put to death. Persons of senatorial and equestrian order shall be degraded from their ranks; and if, after they are reduced to the level of the common people, they persist in the profession of Christianity, they shall be capitally punished. Patrician ladies, who shall avow themselves Christians, shall first suffer the confiscation of their fortunes, and afterwards be banished. Slaves and freed-men, who shall be found in the service of the imperial house-

^{*} A barren tract of country, about 50 miles from Carthage.

[†] Euseb. vii. 11.
‡ Euseb. B. xi. ch. 11. Cave's Lives. Dionysius was afterwards ordered by the governor to remove to a more distant and disagreeable place of banishment; but he had the consolation of knowing that the heathen converts he left behind him at Cephron continued stedfast, immoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord, through the influence of some of his rious flock of Alexandria, who were sent thither into exile.

hold, now or formerly professing themselves Christians, shall be held as thenceforth the personal property of the emperor, and be despatched in fetters to labour in the mines, or any other of the public works which the emperor is carrying on." * Such were the new penalties which the authorities of Rome annexed to the profession of Christianity. While they maintained an appearance of clemency, and a reluctance to proceed to extreme severities, they discovered a fixed determination to aim a deadly blow at the bishops, and to put a stop to the progress of the Gospel among the higher orders. Valerian himself, probably, must be exculpated from having any active hand in carrying his edict into execution, as he was about this time busily engaged in preparations for a foreign war. there was no want of persons in authority who had all the inclination to bring it into immediate execution; and accordingly, there was scarcely a department of the empire where the arrival of the imperial proclamation was not instantaneously followed by the outbreak of cruelties. Rome took the lead; and as the early patronage of the emperor had brought most Christians of rank into public view, so that there was little difficulty in finding them, the magistrates of that city distinguished themselves by their forward zeal, in summoning the bishop, and all of respectable condition, known or suspected to be believers, to give an account of their religion, and to signify their willingness to sacrifice to the gods. As usual, confiscation, banishment, and death, became the order of the day. and women of the first rank in Roman society, -officers and private soldiers, -accomplished citizens and simple country people,—persons of fortune and the meanest slaves, -old people and children, -were, some of them, exposed to every indignity, others scourged, beheaded, or consumed in the flames. Many of the Christians were apprehended in the cemeteries, which

^{*} Cyprian, Epist. 82.

they had at this time learned to regard as sanctuaries, as well as places of worship. In one of these Sextus, Bishop of Rome, suffered martyrdom, and four of his deacons shared the fate of their minister.* The example of the magistrates in the capital was zealously followed by those in remoter parts of the empire; and many of the bishops, who, by the conciliatory policy of new governors, were flattered with the hope of an early recall from their banishment, were not only disappointed, but by this last edict of the emperor, found themselves unexpectedly involved in greater dangers. The case of Cyprian, the most eminent martyr in this persecution, may be quoted as an example. He had removed from his exile at Curubis to a country-house of his own in the near neighbourhood of Carthage, where, however, he was still obliged to keep himself secluded from his flock. The violent proceedings at Rome, and the death of Sextus, the mild and pacific bishop of that city, were regarded as the shadows of coming events to himself. To all the earnest and importunate entreaties of his friends and flock to consult his safety by flight, he lent a deaf ear, although, when he was summoned to appear before the proconsul at Utica, he did conceal himself for fear of his being called to suffer at a distance from the beloved seat of his ministry. On the arrival of Galerius at Carthage, he cheerfully surrendered himself; and so great was the interest taken in the fate of Cyprian, that although the Christians were to a man proscribed, hundreds crowded round the tribunal of the governor, forgetting all personal dangers in anxiety about their excellent pastor. The trial did not last long; for no sooner had the bishop confessed himself a Christian, than he sealed his testimony with his blood. The death of Cyprian, it was expected, would dispirit the Christians, and lead to the total suppression of their religion throughout all Africa. But that disastrous event pro-

^{*} Kortholt de Persecutione, chap. ix. 20.

duced the very contrary effect. It roused multitudes, whom that devoted minister had begotten in the faith, to aspire to the same crown of martyrdom, and thus became a signal for the general effusion of Christian blood, both in that province and in other parts of the

empire.*

This gloomy time of trial over, the Christians enjoyed a respite for forty years, during which a great change took place in the external circumstances and aspect of the Church. The Gospel continued daily to gain immense accessions of friends to her cause. Instead of being the religion of a few, it became the faith of the many,—instead of being a small and inconsiderable sect, the believers were a numerous and influential body,—the cross of their master, no longer dreaded as a mark of infamy, was considered the badge of a respectable profession,—the Church was recognised as a public association, possessing rights and property in the State,—their assemblies, instead of being clandestine meetings in subterrancan cemeteries or obscure hovels, were held in edifices conspicuous for architectural grandeur; and those who frequented them were no longer confined to the dregs of society, or to men of humble origin, mean ideas, and mechanical labour; but persons who moved in the highest circles, and commanded respect by their learning and their wealth, gloried in the name of Christians. In this happy interval of toleration, multitudes, no doubt, joined the Church, who brought over with them some of the heathenish customs to which they had been bred, and combined with the profession of Christianity pride, discord, sensuality,—a spirit but little removed, in many respects, from that of their former associates in idolatry. Nevertheless, vital religion did flourish to a great extent, and exhibit the fruits of righteousness in the lives of many, whose exalted rank and official stations made them shine as lights of

^{*} Cave's Lives.

the world; and, as in the palace of Nero, the first persecutor of the Christians, there were some who were not ashamed of the Cross of Christ, so in the times of Diocletian, their last imperial enemy, not a few were appointed to the magistracy, and allowed to hold offices of the highest importance in the government,-some were even introduced into the imperial household, and held stations of honour and trust about the royal person. The librarian of the palace, the emperor's waiting-man,* and some gentlemen of the bed-chamber, were sincere friends of Christianity; and though Diocletian himself was a bigoted heathen, yet, whether through the personal influence of his attendants, or fear of offending the vast number of his subjects who were Christians,—whether the voice of humanity, or the dictates of a timid policy, swayed him, he showed no disposition, when left to himself, to molest the adherents of the Christian faith.

The heathens—both priests, philosophers, and politicians—beheld this state of things with increasing alarm. The silent rapidity with which Christianity was making its way among all classes, did not escape their jealous vigilance; and the painful conviction was forced upon them, that unless the most vigorous efforts were made to check its progress, it would ere long acquire the ascendancy, and become the established religion of the world. In these circumstances, the heads of the pagan party had long been concerting measures for striking a blow, which, as it would be the last, they determined should be a decisive and memorable one; and they only delayed till they had so worked upon the timid and superstitious mind of Diocletian, as to secure his zealous co-operation.

^{*} The Christians about the court were recommended to take the utmost precaution not to offend the heathen emperor. The librarian was to take good care not to show any contempt for worldly knowledge and the old authors; he was to be familiar as a heathen with the poets, philosophers, orators, and historians of antiquity; but then he was sometimes to take an opportunity of praising the Scriptures, to mention Christ, and by degrees to hint that he is the only true God.— Galland Bibliotheca Patrum, quoted by Ncana., vol. i. p. 145.

Many opportunities they sought to gain him over. On one occasion, in particular, when he was offering sacrifices to ascertain the fortune of a war, and some Christian officers, who were officially present, fortified their faith by the customary sign of the cross, he was surprised and mortified to find that no omens could be obtained. A second experiment was made, with no better success. Fresh victims were ordered, and still the soothsayers fruitlessly renewed their inspection,—till at length the artful priests, who had formed their plan, ventured to tell the disappointed and desponding emperor, that the cause of the unpropitious result was owing to the presence of persons who were enemies to the gods. The stratagem was successful; for Diocletian, under the impulse of ungovernable fury, commanded, like another Nebuchadnezzar, that all should bow to the gods of the empire,—that all the inmates of the palace should join in sacrifice, under the penalty of being scourged,—and that all the soldiers who refused this religious observance should be degraded and dismissed.* Thus far the plot against the Christians succeeded. But the emperor, though he allowed this tyrannical mandate to remain in force, could not be prevailed upon, by the most importunate entreaties, to authorise any severer measures; and the conspirators, defeated in this quarter, looked anxiously to another, in the hope of finding a less scrupulous and a more determined accomplice in Galerius, Diocletian's son-in-law, then commander-in-chief of the army.† This ferocious bigot was easily induced, both by his religious and political prejudices, to enforce with the sternest rigour the emperor's order for every soldier to sacrifice; and accordingly, an approaching festival, in the year 298, in honour of Diocletian's

^{*} Lactantius—Death of the Persecutors, chap. x.
† One of the first acts of Diocletian was to give the title and power of emperor to Maximianus Herculeus, and soon after to Galerius and Constantius. A partition of the empire was accordingly made, and the four colleagues ruled over their respective provinces.

colleague in the throne,—a season solemnized with all the pomp and circumstance of the pagan ritual, was fixed upon as a fit occasion for making the obligation to sacrifice imperative on every individual in the army. Few atoned by their death for refusing compliance, as the emperor had given the Christian soldiers the alternative of leaving the service. great numbers, both officers and privates, quitted their ranks; and in doing so, it is not improbable that some, by their language or their manner, gave vent to their indignant feelings with an indiscretion that was eagerly made a pretext by their enemies for punishing them, on the charge of insubordination and mutiny. One memorable instance of such fervid and irrepressible zeal, was furnished by a young officer of the name of Marcellus. The moment that he understood the general orders to sacrifice, he sprang from the table where he sat at mess, and casting away with violence his belt and arms, exclaimed-" Henceforth I cannot serve the emperor as a soldier: I despise your gods of wood and stone, deaf and dumb images. If a soldier's profession cannot be followed without sacrificing to the gods and the emperor, I abandon the ranks, and shall never bear arms." This bold language was immediately declared to be treason, and without almost a moment's delay, sentence of death was pronounced upon the speaker.

But the pride of Galerius, offended at this disobedience to his commands,—for a recent victory had made him insufferably arrogant and imperious,—could not be appeased by the death of one Christian soldier. He aimed at nothing less than sacrificing the whole race of Christians at the shrine of his savage ambition, and while his devotion to the cause of idolatry had predisposed him to enter with his utmost energy into the dark designs of its partizans, he now, from reasons personal to himself, assailed his old sick father-in-law, by every mode of persuasion, to consent to a general persecution of the obnoxious sect. Bent on this sanguinary project, he determined to winter in Bithynia with Diocletian, who now confined himself to Nicomedia,—and, by engaging the weak and capricious emperor in almost daily conferences on the subject he had nearest at heart,-by sometimes flattering his foolish fancy of making his favourite city rival the splendour of Rome,—at other times, exciting his fear by the boldness of his military plans, he wrung from him a reluctant permission to unsheathe the sword.* Several contemporary occurrences lent weight to the counsels of Galerius. The empire rang with the insane doctrines of the Manichees and other heretics, who were either ignorantly or on purpose confounded with the Christians. Romula, the mother of Galerius, furnished arguments of another kind. That gay woman, who was a passionate admirer of the pagan rites, enlivened the dulness of the wintry season, by giving a series of splendid banquets in her palace, at which a selection of her favourite ceremonies, with appropriate music, formed an invariable part of the amusements of the evening. The élite of Nicomedia crowded her elegant saloons,—and both town and country resounded with praises of the princely hospitalities of Romula. Some Christians of rank, however, from a dislike of the idolatrous part of the entertainment, on which she chiefly prided herself, having declined her invitation, the offended woman vowed that nothing but their blood could expiate the public insult they had offered to her character, and from that moment, came as a powerful auxiliary to reinforce the appeals of her son. To the joint repre-

^{*} Diocletian had an extraordinary passion for building, but was so capricious in his taste, that what he reared to-day he often pulled down to-morrow. He was wholly occupied in such follies. He was extremely avaricious, and so was his colleague Maximian, who, besides, was a monster of debauchery. He scrupled at nothing to amass treasures. Whenever he needed money, he engaged false witnesses to accuse the richest senators, whose property was forthwith confiscated.—Lactantius, Death of Persecutors, ch. viii.

sentations of both, Diocletian, who was invariably averse to the shedding of blood, pleaded reasons of State, and strongly objected the inexpediency of weak-ening his throne by the slaughter of so immense a body of his subjects. But at the next interview, some officers high in command, having been introduced through the means of Galerius, artfully dwelt on the sad decline of the national worship; and on the old Roman principle, that the fate of the empire was now suspended on its immediate restoration, the facile mind of the emperor could no longer withstand these repeated assaults, and in an evil hour he put his name to an edict, already prepared for his signature, which ordained that the assemblies of Christians were thenceforth illegal, that their churches should be demolished, and that the Scriptures should be burnt. This sweeping act of proscription was proclaimed at a great heathen festival, on 23d February 303,—and the very next morning the citizens of Nicomedia received a memorable proof that it was not intended to lie a dead letter. At dawn, a detachment of military was stationed round the church of that town, conspicuous by its site on an eminence, and on a signal from the palace, which was almost contiguous, a hundred arms were applied to batter down the walls,—a few copies of the sacred volume belonging to it were burnt,—and in a few hours the beautiful edifice was a heap of ruins.* Another edict appeared on the following day, commanding all Christians in office to abjure their religion, or instantly resign, and that those in humble life should be degraded to the condition of slaves. The first victim of this second edict was a Christian of rank, who, impelled with honest indignation at the tyranny, and forgetting, in the heat of his zeal, the Christian submission due to the royal authority, snatched the

^{*} Lactantius says that Diocletian and Galerius stood on a watch-tower long disputing whether it should be set on fire. The opinion of the former, who was afraid for the safety of the adjoining buildings, was at length adopted.

proclamation from the wall, and, tearing it in a thousand pieces, threw it away, with some contemptuous exclamations.* He was seized by some pagan bystanders, tried for the crime of treason, and immediately executed. † Two successive fires having accidentally broken out in the palace, and being represented to Diocletian as the work of Christian incendiaries, his resentment was inflamed to such a degree that he resolved, to the malignant joy of his pagan counsellors, to become the executioner of his own edict. He summoned some Christian domestics to his presence, and caused them to be put to torture; others, who had been formerly favourite attendants on his person, he commanded to sacrifice, and on their refusal put them to instant death. ‡ In a few hours he left not a single Christian in his household but his wife Prisca, and her daughter by a former husband. But although he witnessed the last moments of almost all those Christians who had grown gray in his service, he could not extort one single word which could fasten on any one of them the crime of causing the conflagration.

Meanwhile, the advisers of the bloody edicts were busy with the work of destruction. Copies of them having been despatched to all the provinces, every place in the empire exhibited the appearance of devastation and bloodshed. Every where churches were levelled with the ground,—Christian pastors were beheaded,—and such vast numbers, who refused to sacrifice, were reserved for various punishments, that multitudes of houses had to be converted into prisons for their reception. Nicomedia, of course, being within

^{*} Euseb. viii.

^{*} Euseb. viii.
† Lactantius accuses Galerius of having employed emissaries to set the palace on fire; but there seems, from the silence of Eusebius, who was a cotemporary of these events, to be no good foundation for the charge.
‡ Two of his servants he hanged—a third, Peter, an old favourite, was broiled on a gridfron.—Euseb. vol. viii. 6. Lactantius says they were not executed one after another, but a whole herd of them were put on the same fire; and servants, with a millstone tied round their necks, were cast into the sa—Ch xv. cast into the sea .- Ch. xv.

the immediate reach of the emperor and Galerius, had its full share of bloody tragedies. Anthimus, the pious minister of the place, was the first to receive the crown of martyrdom. The deacons, deaconesses, —all who either held office in the Church, or were of note in Christian society, were burned or drowned. Christians, of every age, sex, and condition, would probably have shared the same fate, had not political circumstances broken up the imperial establishment in that place, summoned Diocletian to Rome, and Galerius to Antioch. The former entered the capital about the twentieth anniversary of his reign; and that anniversary being celebrated with more than ordinary splendour of religious observances, proved fatal to Christians of every degree. Numbers were given up at the public shows, for the gratification of the people. Marcellinus, his whole presbyters and deacons, suffered a most lingering and ignominious death. Antioch witnessed still greater and more memorable scenes of Christian carnage than the capital. barbarous Galerius was there; and, left without the presence of Diocletian to check him, he gave the reins to his inhuman anxiety for the slaughter of the Christian race. Every one brought before him as a Christian was indiscriminately massacred; the mere mention of the name Christian was at once his accusation, trial, and condemnation. But it was, as usual, on the clergy that his vengeance principally fell; and the extreme lengths to which he carried matters, with the most eminent believers of Antioch, may be judged of by the horrid barbarities he perpetrated on a deacon of the name of Romanus. Having selected this pious man for more than common severity of punishment, he ordered him first to be half burnt, and then to have his tongue cut out, with which he was frequently calling upon the blessed Jesus. This latter part of the sentence Galerius executed with his own hands, and then remanded the poor mangled Christian to his

cell, where, after he had lingered a few hours, he was strangled.* In every other city of Palestine, the edicts were published by the authority of the tyrant, ordering all persons to join in the sacrifices, and commanding magistrates every where to use all diligence to enforce universal obedience. Heralds were sent through the streets to summon all men to repair with their families to the temples; every one's name was read out by the tribunes, and the causes of absence from the sacrifices were strictly inquired into. † Judges were stationed in all the temples, so that condign punishment was inflicted on all who hesitated to offer incense; and lest, by any unforeseen accident, a Christian should escape the required token of compliance with the established religion of the empire, altars were placed beside the tribunals of justice, that every individual who appeared in court might present an oblation before his cause could be heard. ‡ In Egypt, Africa, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, the same scenes of barbarity were perpetrated, the same tremendous trials awaited the Christians. "All the earth," says Lactantius, "was afflicted, and from east to west, three ravenous wild beasts continued to rage.

"Had I hundred mouths, a hundred tongues, A voice of brass, and adamantine lungs, Not half the dreadful scene could I disclose,

or recount the punishments inflicted by rulers and officers in every province, on religious and innocent

men." §

One peculiar feature of this persecution merits notice—the destruction of the Scriptures. Formerly the heathens had directed their vengeance exclusively against the lives of Christians, flattering themselves, that by the removal of the living friends of the Gospel, the cause itself would receive its death-blow.

^{*} Martyrs of Palestine, ch. ii.

[‡] Lactantius, ch. xv.

[†] Ibid., ch. iv.

[§] Ibid., ch. xvi.

The experience of two centuries having made them better acquainted with the habits of the new sect, taught them, that so long as the Bible existed, the seed of the Word would raise a new succession of believers to increase and perpetuate the worship of Christ in the following age, and that nothing promised to effect the complete and universal suppression of Christianity, but the destruction of the Sacred Volume. In the blind and impetuous prosecution of these views, they not only issued the most positive orders for the delivery of all copies of the Scriptures belonging to churches, but employed inquisitors to search the houses of all known or suspected Christians for the prohibited book. The execution of these orders gave rise to some most interesting traits of attachment to the truth. The bishop of Carthage, the moment the edict for the burning of the Sacred Volume was known in that city, repaired privately to his church, withdrew all the copies of the Scriptures thence to his own house, and left in their room the writings of some contemptible heretics. The inquisitors, whether from indifference or ignorance, seized these as their prey and carried them off. In this case it is probable the governor was not very strict; at all events, as no questions were asked, the bishop cannot be charged with any breach of Christian propriety. On the refusal of another African minister to part with the Scriptures, the humane inquisitors insisted on his delivering to them his superfluous writings, evidently wishing, by the manner in which they made their demand, to afford him a way of escape. But all governors were not equally lax, and all Christians did not so easily retain the precious treasure of their divine books. At this time, when a copy of the Scriptures was valued above jewels, and Christians were afraid to hazard the loss of so precious a treasure by the open and indiscriminate display of their possession, it became a very general practice to conceal the Sacred

Volume in some secret place, -- in some useless and neglected chest, that would excite no suspicion,within a covered hole in the walls of their chambers, -beneath the hearth, or in a corner of their gardens. One copy was reserved for the use of a neighbourhood, and the Christians of the place met in the house of a common friend, who read aloud to the company the words of eternal life. These clandestine meetings, however, like all the other movements of the Christians, transpired through the vigilance of spies and informers. By their instigation, sentinels were secretly placed within a short distance of the place of rendezvous, to mark the persons who frequented the forbidden haunt, and while the pious circle were drawn around in mute and devout attention to the lessons of heavenly wisdom and comfort, rude bands of soldiers would rush upon them, snatch the proscribed volume from the hands of the reader, and drag him and his unresisting companions to pay with their heads the penalty of their stolen enjoyment. In a country town of Numidia, where a company of this description were assembled, the reader had not proceeded far in his much valued office, when their seclusion was disturbed by the appearance of a military party, who, each seizing his man, led the whole group to the tribunal of the proconsul. Undaunted by the painful situation in which they found themselves, the prisoners cheered themselves by the way with singing the songs of Zion; and amid the profane mirth, or the blasphemous threatenings of their guard, encouraged each other "not to be cast down, or disquieted within them; but to trust in God, who would yet be the health of their countenance and their joy." Arrived in the presence of the governor, the burden of undergoing examination fell on the reader. "Why did you harbour these?" was the first interrogation of the proconsul. "I could not decline to receive my brethren," was the calm reply. "The imperial edict," it was again insisted,

ought to have outweighed these considerations.—
"Have you the Holy Scriptures?" "Yes," was the answer of the martyr; "but I have them in my heart."* Similar was the fortitude of Felix, the African believer. Being asked, whether he had the Scriptures, he acknowledged he had. But to the demand for their delivery to the hands of the proconsul, he resolutely replied, that he would not part with them but with his life. On another occasion, a company of about fifty persons, who were apprehended, were, in consequence of their refusal to surrender their Bibles, subjected to the utmost severity of treatment. "Why do you keep the Scriptures, when they are forbidden by the emperor?" "Because," they unanimously exclaimed, "they contain the words of eternal life." † These anecdotes, of which many equally interesting occur in the records of Christian antiquity, exhibit the Christians of that time in a most admirable light. Doubtless, there were multitudes who, valuing the Word of God as better than thousands of gold and silver, took every wise and prudent precaution to preserve it, and when nothing else could avail, were prepared to sacrifice life itself, sooner than part with the inestimable treasure; but there were others, whose conduct was more than questionable, and whose memory cannot be honoured with the same high commendation. Some, in their indiscreet and intemperate zeal, voluntarily ran into the presence of the heathen governors, exclaiming that they were possessed of the Scriptures, but that no menaces, and no tortures, could induce them to disclose the place where the revered Word was hid. Others, again, appalled at the prospect of pain and martyrdom, delivered up their Bibles, and saw them publicly burnt in the marketplace. Of these lukewarm or cowardly Christians the numbers were, unhappily, far from being small; and no event, not even the fiercest rage of persecution,

^{*} Neander, i. p. 156.

[†] Fleury, Hist. Eccles.

convulsed the Church more sorely, or left behind it more lamentable effects than this.

The persecution had continued two years, during which the most dreadful and wide-spread ravages had been committed on the Church, when a memorable change occurred in the politics of the empire. This was the abdication, in 305, of Diocletian, followed almost at the same time, through the intrigues of Galerius, by that of Maximian Herculeus; and as a new division of the government necessarily took place between the reigning emperors, Italy, Gaul, Spain, and Africa, were allotted to Constantius,* while Galerius became sole and irresponsible ruler over Illyria, Greece, Egypt, and the Eastern world. The humane character of Constantius secured, in a great measure, the tranquillity of the Christians within his dominions; but Galerius prosecuted, in the provinces that fell to his share, the same cruel and arbitrary policy as before the resignation of his father-in-law, and the better to farther his hostile designs against Christianity, he had address and influence over his peaceful colleague to give the powers and title of Cæsar to two of his creatures-Severus, and Maximin, his nephew,-men of stern, rough characters, and prepared to second him in any measures, however tyrannical or inhuman. elevation was the signal for reviving the flagging spirit of persecution; and Maximin, in particular, whose unlettered mind made him a bigoted slave to the wildest superstition, authorised the most horrid excesses in Syria, Egypt, and the adjoining territories that were placed under his command. An imperial edict was issued, commanding the inhabitants of all

^{*} Constantius, who had formerly been styled Cæsar, was now elevated to the higher dignity of Augustus. He had been obliged, to satisfy his colleague, and in opposition to his own humane wishes, to demolish some Christian churches, although, so far as was practicable in the excited state of heathen society, he was sparing of lives. The countries, however, under his government, never exhibited the scenes of cruelty and persecution which were then witnessed in the provinces of his colleagues; and the more exalted title and power he now acquired, enabled him more effectually to protect the Christians.

the towns under his jurisdiction to repair to a public place to sacrifice; and in Cesarea the first execution of the edict was signalized by a circumstance which was eagerly laid hold of, as furnishing a pretext for pushing matters to the last extremities. At the moment that Urbanus, the magistrate of the city, was about to commence the ceremony by an act of libation, a young man, of the name of Apphian, of good family and liberal accomplishments, who had relinquished the most brilliant prospects for his attachment to the Gospel, ran forward from the midst of the crowd, and, seizing the arm of the governor, spoke in terms of vehement condemnation of the idolatrous rite; and urged his excellency, at the same time, to embrace the worship of the true God. As might have been expected, so flagrant an act of insubordination could not be overlooked,—Apphian was immediately put to the torture, to force him to sacrifice; and, when no severity of suffering could shake his resolution, he was condemned to pay the penalty of his too forward zeal, by a painful death.* obstinate disobedience of this young man to the imperial edict, led to the rigid examination, and, by necessary consequence, to the torture and death of multitudes of Christians in Cesarea, when Maximin was celebrating some public shows in that city, in honour of his birth-day. Among other spectacles he exhibited in the amphitheatre, was that of a Christian, Agapius, in combat with a bear. That individual, who was eminent for his piety and various accomplishments, was condemned, because he would not renounce Christianity, to fight with wild beasts, for the gratification of a heathen mob; and, after he had been dreadfully mangled, the half dead man was carried back to his cell, where he lingered for a day, and

^{*} His body was afterwards cast into the sea; and the inhabitants of Cesarea remarked it, as an extraordinary occurrence, that, in consequence of furious gusts of wind, the corpse was driven back, and fixed about the gates of the city.—Martyrs of Palestine, ch. iv.

was afterwards sunk with weights in the sea.* A young woman of eighteen was executed for the crime of paying some humane attentions to a few Christian prisoners, who were on their way to the mines; three Christians were sentenced to fight with each other; one venerable believer of fourscore was condemned to a battle with the wild beasts; and an innumerable multitude of others suffered punishments of various kinds, and different degrees of severity, by Urbanus, whose natural ferocity made him a willing tool of the

inhuman monster, Maximin.

A brief pause ensued, the executioners being weary with the work of violence, after which some fresh edicts of Maximin revived the persecution, under circumstances of new, and, if possible, greater atrocity than ever. To inflame the minds of his pagan subjects to the same degree of enmity with himself, he caused some fictitious memoirs of Pilate, full of the most indescribable blasphemies against Christ, to be published, and circulated in all the towns and cities of the empire; and he bribed the schoolmasters of the more distinguished seminaries to prescribe these as lessons to be fixed in the memory, and as themes of declamation for the essays of the heathen boys. They were engraved on tablets of brass on the public walls, so that the common people and children found no topic of conversation so common as that of the absurd pretensions and impieties of Jesus,—and the imputed acts of Pilate in crushing the impostor. Incorporated with these forged acts, which were posted on the public walls of every city, were the depositions of some infamous women, whom a military officer in Damascus had compelled, by torture, to confess that they had been Christians, and that, within assemblies of Christians, the most unnatural and revolting practices were observed, sufficient to call down the vengeance of the gods on every place where the impious

^{*} Martyrs of Palestine, ch. vi.

race were harboured.* By such inflammatory proclamations, the universal indignation of the populace was roused, and the artful Maximin found them every where willing executioners of his tyrannical edicts. At the same time, the temples shone with unwonted splendour; cattle were poured, in immense flocks, into the cities, to supply the extraordinary demands of the occasion. At an appointed season, all the inhabitants were commanded to sacrifice, to purchase perfumed goods in the market, and to observe certain idolatrous customs at the entry of the public baths. The terror of these despotic injunctions drove multitudes from their homes to the solitude of mountains and deserts; where, although they had no society but that of rude barbarians, they enjoyed the valuable privilege of toleration in worship. Among the most eminent of these exiles was the grandfather of Basil, who took refuge in the woody mountains of Pontus, where he lay concealed for seven years, a prey to all the hardships of a barren and ungenial place.† But numbers, who were either so unfortunate as not to escape in time, or who deemed it unlawful to seek safety in flight, remained behind, to afford ample employment for the agents of Galerius and Maximin. No where was the war against Christians more violent and deadly than in Alexandria. It is estimated that the number of victims varied from ten to a hundred daily; and not only Peter, the bishop, and his assistants in the ministry, but all who were eminent for rank, influence, or piety, were marked in the lists of the proscribed,—their names, residence, and personal description, were furnished to the police, who kept so strict a watch, that few Alexandrian Christians long escaped the Argus-eyed myrmidons of the government, but were dragged to trial and the stake. so many Christians of note were involved in the same sad fate, it is unnecessary to specify particular

^{*} Euseb. Hist. Eccles., ch. iv.

[†] Cave's Lives-Basil.

cases,* but we cannot help noticing the martyrdom of Phileas, the bishop, who, along with Philoromus, a person who had once occupied a judicial station of eminence in Alexandria, was condemned to suffer. The respectable rank and families of both these individuals, induced the governor to resort to an unusual expedient, in the hope of saving them. Finding all his persuasions unavailing to lead them to renounce Christianity, he unexpectedly introduced, first, their friends, and then their wives and children, whose presence, he good-naturedly imagined, would make an irresistible appeal to natural affection, and prove an argument superior to the most eloquent reasoning. The prisoners, however, were proof against the trying assault, and died immediately after, sincere and enlightened martyrs to the religion of Christ.† But Providence ere long interposed to terminate those scenes of cruelty. A lingering, loathsome, and hopeless disease, had so softened the savage temper of Galerius, that in the year 311, he published an edict, allowing the Christians the free exercise of their religion, and the liberty of building places of worship, and requesting their special prayers for the recovery of his health. This edict he despatched to all governors of provinces, to put an immediate stop to the farther effusion of blood. But Maximin, more brutally fierce than even his inhuman uncle, Galerius, suppressed the proclamation, and contenting himself with a verbal communication of its contents to those within his reach,—breathed nothing "but threats and slaughter." "His voice was still for war,"-and the object nearest to his heart was, how he might most effectually defeat the relenting edict of Galerius. 1 By means of mercenaries, whom

^{*} Among the most distinguished of the martyrs of Palestine, was Pamphilus, the bosom friend of Eusebius, and a most excellent man.

[†] Burton, vol. ii. p. 442.

[†] The effect of this edict of Galerius was astonishing. "In a moment," says Burton, "all was joy, wonder, and thanksgiving, where before there had been suffering and sorrow." Places of worship were immediately

he sent into all the towns to agitate the people, he got up petitions, addressed to himself, in name of the citizens, praying him to re-establish the ancient religion, and suppress Christianity. From many of the most populous and influential cities of the empire, Nicomedia, Antioch, and Tyre, he procured such addresses; and in order that this fact might be universally known and believed, he caused these addresses, with his gracious answer to his loyal subjects, to be engraven on brazen tablets, and affixed to the walls of the cities. All the cruelties enacted in the time of Galerius were perpetrated anew,-and the implacable tyrant would have probably protracted the season of trials, had he not been alarmed by the angry letters of his colleague Constantine, and by the report of an intended alliance being formed between that emperor's sister and his rival, Licinius. In consequence of this annoying intelligence, his career of bloodshed was for a while suspended; and he carried his dissimulation so far as to pay attention to some of the more eminent Christians, and invite them to share the hospitalities of the imperial table. But even then he secretly insulted them, by causing all the dishes to pass previously through the hands of priests; and he never felt in his element till he had once more erected the stake and the cross, and feasted his eyes with the spectacle of martyred Christians. year of the persecution surpassed in severity the former nine; and while the histories of this period relate many painful instances of individuals suffering,the horrid excesses to which the tyrant went, may be judged of by the circumstance of his ordering a whole town of Phrygia, which, with its magistrates and people, had declared itself Christian, to be burnt to the ground. And on the eve of the memorable battle

opened in the towns, and attended by crowds. The roads were filled with persons returning to their homes, and even the heathen were led to think that God alone could have worked so sudden and blessed a change.

— Eccles. Hist., vol. ii. p. 464.

between him and Licinius, he vowed to Jupiter, that on condition of his being victorious, he would exterminate not similar towns only, but the whole race of Christians.

This was the last and the severest of all the persecutions, which were commenced or sanctioned by the authority of the emperors. In the west of Europe, indeed, owing to the milder character and paternal government of Constantine, the Christians were not much molested; and certainly not beyond the first two years after Diocletian published his first edict against them. But the east, and all other parts of the Roman world, were, during the protracted period of ten years, the scenes of devastation and bloodshed, unparalleled for atrocity in the annals of mankind. Society was convulsed to its centre, and the demons of idolatry seemed to grow more frantic as they saw their dominion over the human mind progressively on the decline. Many melancholy instances occurred during this sanguinary period of the weakness and imperfection of men—of zeal, blended with a portion of worldly fire-of ambition to acquire notoriety, and command admiration, and also of the cowardice and selfishness of nature in renouncing what was believed to be the truth, for the sake of living in ease and pleasure. But these are only a few exceptions to the great and acknowledged excellencies of the general body of the primitive Christians-dark spots, unnoticed and overlooked, amid the bright lustre of faith and hope that animated the ancient Church; and there can be no doubt, that one means appointed by its Divine head for preserving its purity, was the long series of trials to which she was subjected by the emperors of Rome.

CHAPTER III.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

NUMBER OF PERSECUTIONS UNCERTAIN—MARTYRDOM OF APPOLLONIUS, A ROMAN SENATOR—TRIALS FROM OPPOSITION OF PHILOSOPHY—OF PRIESTS
—SYMPHOROSA—SYMPHORIANUS—POPULAR OUTRAGES—TRIALS FROM RELATIVES AND FRIENDS—ANECDOTES.

It is an old and popular error to consider the trials of the primitive Christians as comprised within the limits of ten persecutions.* This number, if applied to those vexatious and sanguinary aggressions that were committed by imperial authority on the adherents of the Gospel in all parts of the world at once, is probably too great, since, even during the most tyrannical administrations, and when persecution raged with fiercest violence and to the widest extent, there were always some places happily exempted from the general calamity. Thus, for instance, the massacre of the Christians by Nero, the first persecutor, bloody and destructive as it was, was almost wholly confined to the city and neighbourhood of Rome; and in like manner,

* This idea was first broached in the end of the fourth century, and is supposed to have been suggested by Rev. xvii. 12-14. The dates of these persecutions, according to the most approved chronology, are as follows:—

Persecution in the reign of Nero, happened in the year after Christ 64

Domitian, 93

Trajan. 104

Hadrian, 125

Aurelius, 152

Severus, 196

Aurelius, 152
Severus, 196
Maximin Thrace, 235
Decius, 250
Valcrian, 257
Diocletian. 303

during the persecution of Diocletian, the last and most dreadful of all that the Christians ever encountered, that large portion of the empire in Western Europe which owned the sway of Constantius Chlorus, knew nothing, except by distant rumour, of the disastrous condition of the believers in other quarters. That humane prince, although he was not a Christian, continued to pursue a mild and conciliatory policy towards his Christian subjects, long after the bloody edict of his colleagues had been fulminated from the conclaves of Nicomedia; and when at length, through the angry and menacing communications of Galerius and Maximin, he was compelled to have recourse to measures of severity, he contented himself with a slight vengeance on the walls of the churches, without unsheathing the sword against the person of a single Christian. Besides, during all the general persecutions described in the foregoing chapters, there were many provincial governors whose humanity recoiled from the violent proceedings instituted against the Christians; or who, having some knowledge of their peaceable and exemplary habits, not only sought pretexts for dismissing them unscathed from the criminal courts, but extended over them the shield of their protection and favour.*

If, again, this number is understood to comprehend the whole trials of the followers of Christ during the first three centuries, it falls very far short of the truth; for, from the reign of the infamous Nero till the time of Constantine, there was scarcely any period that did not find them suffering on account of their religion in some part of the world. No sooner had the work of destruction ceased in one province, than it commenced in another; and while it generally originated in the place where the emperor resided, whether Rome or Nicomedia, it speedily extended to distant provinces, which usually, in proportion to their remoteness, surpassed the capital in hostility to the Christians.

^{*} Burton, vol. ii. p. 436; Neander, p. 160.

Occasions were never wanting for the renewal of persecutions against that devoted people; and unhappily, the violent changes that almost yearly took place in the imperial line, together with the generally unsettled state of the political hemisphere, produced causes of irritation against the Christians, which, in ordinary circumstances, would not have existed. Their pacific conduct, and the strict neutrality they observed amid the political convulsions and the fierce struggles for power which latterly so much disturbed the empire, were so far from exempting them from annoyance, that the emperor scrupled not to sully the laurels of victory by persecuting them for not taking up arms in support of his claims; and not seldom, too, did some new adventurer, whose ambition pointed to the throne, attempt to advance his pretensions, and curry favour with the populace, by gratifying their thirst for Christian blood. In the provinces, where for nearly two centuries the edict of Trajan continued a standing law for regulating judicial procedure in regard to Christians, it depended wholly on the personal character of the proconsul, whether that protecting ordinance was adhered to or infringed; and as, in nine cases out of ten, the governors sympathized with the people in religious prejudices, or were influenced by the most sordid motives in the administration of justice, it was at all times easy for the enemies of the Christians, in the face of Trajan's act, to accuse them with impunity, and accomplish their ruin.* A very remarkable example of the unscrupulous evasion of this law, occurred during the reign of Commodus, in the case of Apollonius, a Roman senator. He had been brought before Perennius, on whom the emperor had entirely devolved the care of the State, on the charge of being a Christian; and that minister feeling a desire to screen Apollonius, determined to revive the old standing decree, that the accuser of a Chris-

^{*} Tertullian's Letter to Scapula.

tian should be put to death. But this had not the effect of screening his Christian friend; for the senate, deeming their honour concerned in the circumstance of one of their members embracing a new form of religion, took up the matter, summoned the accused into their presence, and on hearing from his own lips a learned statement and defence of his faith, condemned him by the very same law of Trajan, which ordained that all who acknowledged themselves Christians before a magistrate should be put to death, and accordingly this pious senator suffered, although the informer had been previously executed for bringing an accusation against him as a Christian.* This iniquitous proceeding took place in the capital, and by the unanimous vote of the senate, which hesitated not to violate the law in their eagerness to punish one of their own body for the unpardonable crime of Christianity; and we may judge by this, how readily governors of distant provinces, left to their own discretion, and assailed by the importunities or bribes of the people over whom they presided, would make the ordinances for the protection of Christians bend to their own convenience and the humour of others. fact, it was so. The law of Trajan had become a dead letter; and there was not a single province of the empire, where, if a just and humane deputy governed it one year, he was not succeeded the next by another, who made his tribunal the daily resort of the accusers of Christians, and prostituted his official powers to punish and execute that unoffending race.

But it was not from the strong arm of power only that the trials of the primitive Christians proceeded. The philosophers were their formidable enemies; and it was not the least bitter ingredient in their cup of affliction, that some of the most virulent and calumnious attacks on them by contemporary writers, were ungenerously published at the very time when they

^{*} Euseb. Hist. Eccles., 21.

were exposed to all the severity of persecution, and when their sufferings were likely to be increased by the circulation of malignant satire.* In the front of these assailants stood Porphyry, Lucian, and Celsus, all of whom were unquestionably men of talents, and bigoted disciples of the philosophy of the age,—but whose works, at least the latter two, though they profess to expose, in calm and serious discussion, the doctrines of the Christians, are filled chiefly with absurd and slanderous fictions. As they had no wish to know the truth, they read the Scriptures, or listened to their statements, with no other view than to ridicule and confute them. Thus, for instance, they reproached Christians with founding their religion on the basis, not of solid and rational argument, but of a blind credulity, that sets all reason and judgment at defiance. They represented the Christian society as composed of thieves, strumpets, and the most flagitious characters, because sinners of every description were invited to accept the offers of the Gospel. described Christian humility as a mean and contemptible disposition, by which men were led constantly to be on their knees,—to lie prostrate on the ground, -to appear in poor and tattered garments, and to be They ridiculed the atonement covered with ashes. as a contemptible expedient for mending the world, and altogether unnecessary, as mankind were as good then as they had been at the beginning. They scouted the performance of miracles, and maintained that the Eastern jugglers wrought as great wonders every day in the market-places for a little money, as Christ and the apostles did. Lucian, who was a wit and a libertine, directed his shafts solely against what appeared to him the weak parts of Christianity,—those which were particularly capable of being represented in a ludierous point of view. His sarcastic raillery had ample scope for its exercise against the brotherly

^{*} Neander, p. 164.

love which subsisted among Christians,—their reliance on a crucified man as a God, and the triumphant hopes they cherished of immortal life; * and coming, as his attacks did, not in the form of grave arguments, but grotesque caricatures, they made "the world's dread laugh" a more formidable engine of torture than even the stake or the cross. By philosophers of every school, whether the frigid stoics, or the sensual epicureans, or the rational Platonists, or the pompous rhetoricians, the followers of Christ were assailed with ridicule and contempt, and held up in writings or conversation as objects of public infamy. Nay, their enemies sometimes resorted to less legitimate and most unphilosophic means of assault. Hierocles, the literary governor of Alexandria, published a work full of the most shameless falsehoods against the Christians, in the midst of a persecution against them which he himself had commenced. Crescens, the Cynic, and Fronto, from whom the Emperor Aurelian took lessons in elocution, distinguished themselves by their zeal in giving every annoyance to the Christians of their day, and by their malicious gratification in putting them to death. † Philosophers though they were, they were incapable of understanding the spiritual doctrines which Christianity taught about God and the soul. They supposed that a religion which had no temples, no statues, and no altars, was a secret form of impiety, and certain of drawing down the anger of the very gods they affected to despise. # Even Porphyry could gravely maintain, during a season of great mortality, that the power of the god Esculapius was frustrated by the increasing influence and numbers of the Christians; and on that account, recommended their extermination as enemies of the gods. Scarcely did the primitive Christians ever encounter more bitter and deadly ene-

^{*} Neander, p. 175. † Justin, Second Apology.

‡ They held, that whoever despised the authority of the gods, would not respect the institutions of man.—Dion.

mies, than the disciples of the ancient philosophy, unless we place on a level with them the priests of the

reigning superstition.

Under the general denomination of priests, we rank a host of persons, formidable alike by their bigoted attachment to the rites of Paganism, and by their prodigious influence with all classes of society. Among these, from pontiffs of the highest order, who were generally scions of equestrian and senatorial families, and not unfrequently intrusted with offices of government, to the lowest menial in the service of the gods-artisans and traders of all sorts, whose employment consisted in furnishing the shrines and statues, the victims and incense which idolatry required,—dealers in magic and jugglery, keepers of public places of entertainment, and an infinite multitude of others, whose interests were bound up with the continued prosperity of the temples,there prevailed an intense feeling of hatred to the Christians, which was ever ready to break out into open hostility, as often as the latter gave some new symptoms of refusal to conform to the ancient worship. Feeling serious alarms lest the progress of the Gospel, which had already diminished the splendour and emoluments of their several professions, would endanger the very existence of their crafts,—those priestly agitators left no stone unturned by which they could render Christians the objects both of imperial vengeance and popular odium. Those of them whose rank and family connections procured them access to the presence and the ears of royalty, often denounced to the emperors those persons whose Christianity gave them the greatest umbrage; and, by their instigation, many individual and local outrages were committed on the followers of Christ, at times when there was no public or special persecution of his friends. Thus, in the memorable case of Symphorosa, her husband, a Roman gentleman of high rank and fortune,

had, for his refusal to sacrifice to the gods, fallen a victim to the machinations of the priests, but their offended pride could not be appeased till every member of this Christian family had met the same violent fate. They, accordingly, formed their plans; and at a time when Hadrian was laying the foundations of a splendid country house, and honouring the joyous occasion with an extraordinary profusion of idolatrous rites, they persuaded the credulous emperor, that the omens would not be favourable, unless this Christian lady and her family, who were in the neighbourhood, should join in this sacrifice. Hadrian, full of indignation, summoned her into his presence, and commanded her and her children to do homage to the gods, on penalty of death. Her refusal, as might have been expected, sealed her fate; and her seven sons, who were no less resolute, cheerfully parted with life, rather than comply with the idolatrous rite. * With the inferior magistrates, who were more easily approached, the priestly influence was attended with still more frequent and fatal success. As it was no part of their policy to allow the Christians to live in peace, much less to enjoy the smiles of official favour and patronage, they employed every art to poison the minds of the governors against them. Scarce a day passed but they dragged some of the obnoxious believers to the tribunals, on the charge either of irreverence to the national objects of worship, or some crime against the customs of society or the laws of the State; and by artful colouring of some, by studied misrepresentation of other practices of the Christians, by turns incensed, prejudiced, and alarmed magistrates, who had no intention of persecuting the people for their religion, to adopt measures of severity against the whole race. In no case was their malignant zeal against the Christians more active than when these betrayed any public manifestations

^{*} Burton, Eccles. Hist., p. 67.

of contempt for the rites of idolatry; and as at seasons of rejoicing, festivals, and all popular processions through the streets, images of their gods were carried, at sight of which passengers were requested to give a reverential bow, the moment that a Christian was observed to frown upon the symbol, or to pass without the customary tokens of homage, he was apprehended by the eagle-eved emissaries of the priests, and hurried off to the judgment-seat, as an enemy of the gods. Among innumerable instances of such summary vengeance, we shall content ourselves with the mention of one which happened at a small town in the neighbourhood of Lyons. The magistrates of the place had acted on the principle of toleration, and although they knew that there were some Christians in the city, they had neither searched for them, nor given them any disturbance in the exercise of their peculiar worship, till, on the annual return of a religious festivity, a tumultuous outcry was occasioned by the refusal of one of their number to make the expected salute to the divinity as it moved along the highway. It was an image of Cybele, carried round the town as usual in a stately car, and an immense concourse of people were accompanying it with all the noisy demonstrations of devotion which distinguished the rites of that goddess. At intervals the assembled multitude threw themselves at the feet of the statue—and the signal had been given for a new act of prostration, when Symphorianus, a young man of family and fortune, who was passing by, continued his erect posture, pleading his conscientious scruples to join in the idolatrous act. The indignation of the officiating priest knew no bounds, and finding his fiery zeal for the honour of the goddess readily seconded by the acclamations of the excited populace, he forthwith ordered him to be carried before the governor, who, through the irresistible influence of the priestly counsellor, condemned the young Christian, in spite of the

importunities and tears of his powerful connections, to immediate execution.*

But it was chiefly to the prejudices and selfishness of the people that the priests addressed themselves, and it was by the aid of the "fierce democracy," more than by edicts of emperors and the countenance of magistrates, they hoped to crush the rival religion. The popular mind was an engine of prodigious power, which they could at all times wield for the accomplishment of their own purposes, and seldom was a group of idlers collected on the streets, but some meddling official of the temples and his brothermechanics in their employ, raised the shout of "There goes, or there lives, a Christian," and forthwith assailed the unfortunate object of their hatred with a shower of missiles. But the deadliest blow against the Christians was always reserved for the great solemnities,—whether religious observances or civil anniversaries, it mattered not, as all public occasions were attended with some ceremonies of worship. Amid the excesses and revelry which the artful demagogues were at such times forward to encourage, the zeal of the people for the national faith naturally ran high, and could easily be made to discharge itself in torrents of impetuous vengeance on any object that implied dishonour or gave opposition to the gods. Accordingly, those seasons were invariably selected by the priests for instigating violent proceedings against the Christians, and to make sure of their victims, they took care to let the festivity be far advanced, and the hearts of the rabble inflamed with wine and pleasure, ere they raised the hue and cry,-" There are enemies of the gods among us." That was the signal for pillage and massacre. The houses of the Christians, which had previously been marked, were from that moment besieged, and forcibly enteredthe inmates apprehended as the worst of criminals

^{*} Neander, p. 114; Hailes' Martyrs of Lyons.

—their persons treated with every indignity, and the tumult never ceased till the implacable revenge of the priests had been appeased by the sacrifice of the more conspicuous believers. Such were the scenes enacted at almost every heathen festivity for the first three centuries. The magistrates, unable to contend against the popular tide, connived at the outrages, or knowing that the insurrection was designed solely to rid society of a few gloomy and disaffected religionists, willingly allowed the fury of the mob full scope to expend itself; so that the bigot supporters of the honours of Jupiter, and the other occupiers of the Pantheon, waxing bold by the silent permission of these lawless excesses, renewed their arts to excite the irritation of their followers, daily promoted the circulation of some new slander against the disciples, and at length, by their indefatigable malignity, brought things to such a state, that the poor persecuted Christians could scarce enjoy any short interval of repose, or find a place to rest the sole of their foot. That the trials of the Christians, arising from the secret machinations of the priests, were severe and manifold, even when there was no public and authorized persecution of their religion, many painful instances might be adduced from the works of contemporary writers to prove. One example only shall be given relating to the period of the brief but terrible persecution of Decius. "That persecution," says Dionysius, "had not its beginning from the imperial edict, but began a whole year before; -- a soothsayer and poet stirred up the multitudes against us, exhorting them to contend for the superstition of their country. Instigated by him, and having it in their power to do as they pleased, they thought that religion lay in nothing more than in killing us. First of all, they laid hold of an aged man, named Metrius, commanding him to repeat some profane words, and when he refused, they laid many blows upon his body with

clubs, and pricked him on the face and eyes with sharp reeds, and then leading him into the suburbs, they stoned him to death. Afterwards dragging a pious woman, named Quinta, to their temple, they required her to fall and worship the idol; but she positively disdaining to comply, they tied her feet, and dragged her through the city, which is paved with sharp stones, and having dashed her against millstones and scourged her, they led her to the same place, and stoned her. They then broke into the houses of many pious men, robbing and plundering them of what they possessed. Many of the brethren saved themselves by flightjoyfully taking the spoiling of their goods. Moreover, they laid hold of a venerable lady, named Apollonia, they struck her upon the face, and beat out all her teeth-then lighting a fire without the city, they threatened to burn her alive, unless she would join with them in pronouncing their blasphemous words, but she, begging a short respite, and being let loose, threw herself into the fire, and was consumed to ashes. Serapion they seized in his own house, and having broken all his limbs, hurled him headlong from the upper part of the dwelling. Nor had we a safe passage any where through public streets and narrow lanes, either by night or day; but continually every where the people were universally crying out, 'Whoever refuses to pronounce such and such impious words, let them be immediately seized and thrown into the fire.' Things went on in this way for some time, till at length the edict itself came, which greatly increased our trials." * Such deadly enemies to the Christians were the priests, the sellers of victims, and the whole tribe of attachés to the temples. They were the chief instigators of all the cruelties inflicted on the followers of Christ, since to them belongs the infamy, not only of whetting the rage of the populace, and throwing the apple of discord into every city, village and hamlet,

^{*} Lardner, vol. viii. p. 148; Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. xi. p. 9.

where Christians were to be found; but of originating, through their creatures in the Court, many of the coercive edicts of the emperors. All the powers of the State, and all the prejudices of the people, they laboured constantly to enlist against the believers, and their malice was always most active and implacable at those periods when the rulers were disposed to show

any indulgence to the adherents of the Gospel.

But the great and sorest trials of the primitive Christians proceeded from a quarter totally different from any now mentioned. They might have borne the ridicule and contempt of philosophers, - they might have braved the outrages of the priests,—they might have escaped the pains and penalties of the imperial inquisitors,—for how often have the inventive resources of strong affection pointed out ways and means of concealment, which it baffled the Argus-eyed blood-hounds of persecution to discover? But unhappily, their foes were often found in their own household, and those whom, it might have been supposed, the dictates of nature would have prompted to throw over them the shield of their protection, and made anxious to conceal, if they could not prevent, the conversion of their friends, were generally the foremost to visit that change of religion with tokens of their severest displeasure. The condition of a Christian in an ancient Pagan family, was to the last degree Multitudes of single persons even, in the hottest periods of persecution, passed with impunity, and lived unmolested,—the obscurity of their rank, or the remoteness of their situation, preventing their attachment to Christianity from reaching the ears of the public oppressors of the faith. But in the family or workshop, where every movement was observed, and every habit known, no exercise of vigilance, no measures of precaution, could long screen the reader of the Scriptures, or "him that prayed," from the hostile eyes of those with whom he was daily and

hourly mingling. The discovery by unbelieving relatives and friends, that one of their circle had become a worshipper of the Crucified, or was seeking his stolen enjoyment in the perusal of the Christian parchments, was accompanied with a feeling of horror as great as that with which they would have detected the appearance of a plague-spot; and they who would have disregarded or excused, perhaps with a smile, in their most intimate associates, the perpetration of the grossest vices, or the existence of the most grovelling habits, felt all their most violent passions in arms against them the moment they found them to be Christians. ter however wise, virtuous, or respectable, they had been hitherto esteemed in other respects,—the highest degree of excellence could not remove the indelible stigma which the profession of Christianity was supposed to have attached to their name. Their families looked upon them as the dupes of a wretched and pestilent delusion,—the hands which were formerly ready to give them a welcome embrace, no longer returned the friendly pressure,-the tongues which used to be eloquent in praise of their estimable qualities, maintained a contemptuous silence respecting them, or mentioned them only with pity, as having sunk to the lowest point of human degradation; -and what between the scorn and buffeting of some, the bitter sarcasm and unfeeling insults of others, and the studied avoidance of all, the position of the primitive Christians, in private and domestic life, was a daily series of trials immeasurably more painful than the fiercest violence of the torture or the stake. Even in those rare cases of exception, where the adoption of Christianity made no abatement of natural affection, and the kindly offices of friendship and civility were interchanged as before, they could not mingle in the society of those they most loved and reverenced on earth, without finding circumstances perpetually occurring which rendered that intercourse acutely pain-

ful to their feelings. If brethren, they could not indiscriminately associate with their own family, whose commonest actions, and commonest forms of speech, were impregnated with idolatry. They shuddered at the blessing of love, which to their ears was uttered in a demon's name,—they could not meet at the same hospitable board without being offended, at the commencement or termination of their meals, by observing names invoked and libations made, which, in their view, were acts of profanity. At births, marriages, funerals,—in the most joyous or the most solemn vicissitudes of human life,—they were often compelled to forego the company of their friends, or else they purchased that enjoyment at the expense of their holiest and most cherished feelings. If they were slaves, their situation was still more trying, from their being denied the privilege of refusing to perform offices, which were not disagreeable to them as servants, but culpable as Christians. Their life became a painful struggle between attachment to their earthly, and fidelity to their heavenly Master. Their souls were daily agitated with remorse, when they were required to place even a crumb of cake before the household gods he honoured as the guardians of his dwelling. Their hand shook with trembling, when on festive occasions they were sent to pour out a cup of wine on the threshold, and when, on the thanksgiving anniversaries, so frequent in the families of the Greeks and Romans, their duty was to pronounce aloud the name of a national deity—they feared incurring the penalties of the unpardonable sin, if they named the detestable word. Thus, all the tender and amiable feelings of their nature, heightened and refined as they were by Christianity, were a constant source of trials to the believers from their intercourse with their heathen friends. No eye but that of Omniscience saw, and no book but that of His remembrance can tell the secret, though deep and bitter agonies of soul, which father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, relative or slave, daily felt from the unbelief or annoyances of their idolatrous household—agonies all the more acute and heart-rending, that they were, from their circumstances, studiously concealed from observation, and proceeded from causes of sorrow, which could not be unbosomed to any friendly or sympathetic ear around.

But, alas! it was but rarely that Christians were allowed by their unbelieving relatives to continue in the same affectionate intercourse as before. Conversion generally severed all the ties of nature, and those who had all their lifetime been objects of the warmest love and endearment to their families, were, from the moment of their embracing the Gospel, looked upon as aliens—as entailing such foul and indelible disgrace on their name as would not allow their kinsfolk to hold up their heads with honour and freedom in society. The most anxious and persevering efforts were made to detach them from the new sect, and win them back to the faith and worship of their ancestors. Those who were in circumstances to afford it, sent them on their travels, to dissipate, amid foreign scenery and manners, what they termed a fit of religious melancholy. Some undertook long and expensive journeys to consult the oracles on the best means of reclaiming their apostatizing friends-others flattered, entreated, and remonstrated with them by turns, exhausting all the arguments which pride, interest, and regard to reputation furnished; and when they found all the arts of persuasion employed in vain, they visited their "obstinacy," as it was called, with the weight of their heaviest displeasure. Children were disowned, disinherited, and sometimes sold for slaves by their parents, although they had no ground of complaint against them, but their attachment to Christianity. Masters threw their servants into prison, although they now found them more

submissive, docile, and useful than ever. Wives, though patterns of virtue and conjugal fidelity, were often annoyed by their husbands inviting parties of their dissolute friends to their homes, and commanding the attendance of their partners, at the very time they were in the habit of going to the church,-or locking them up for days and weeks in dark rooms, where they were fed on bread and water,—or burning their Bibles,-or giving to the dogs the pieces of communion-bread, which, according to the fashion of primitive times, they had deposited for private use in their chests, -or turning them adrift, houseless and unprotected wanderers, at midnight to the streets. multitudes, dead to all the feelings of nature, often became informers against their Christian relativeswith their own hands dragged them to the tribunals of the governors, and stood in the foremost ranks of the crowd at their execution, "consenting to their death." * A few historical anecdotes will illustrate this. A woman, married to a profligate, whom she had long aided with money and other means, to prosecute his debaucheries, was at length happily converted to the faith of Jesus, and of course she not only ceased to be the guilty partner of her husband's excesses, but exerted herself, by fervent prayers, and a course of the most affectionate and patient remonstrances, to reclaim him from his habits of dissipation. Enraged at her altered conduct, he perpetrated the most unnatural barbarities on his submissive wife, and at length carried her, as an enemy to the gods, before the judgment-seat. A Roman of patrician rank had an only son, who was the heir of his title and his immense fortune, and on whose education he had bestowed the greatest pains and expense. In Athens, whither he had been sent for the last accom-

^{*} This was a literal accomplishment of prophecy. "The brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death."—Mark xiii. 12-

plishments-the young man was thrown into the society of some Christians, whose conversation and example produced on his mind so beneficial an influence, that it led to his becoming a sincere and devoted follower of Christ. His father recalled him to Rome, and finding, to his bitter disappointment, that it was impossible, by all his paternal authority or threats, to induce him to abandon the principles he had embraced, the unnatural parent, considering them as a foul stain on his family escutcheon, disowned his only son, and adopted that of a freedman, whom he made the heir of all he possessed. In the persecution of Diocletian, a Carthaginian girl, of the name of Victoria, became a Christian, while her father, brother, and the rest of her family, continued heathens. Being dragged to the tribunals on account of her religion, her brother unceasingly pronounced her to be insane, and pleaded the unsound state of her mind as a reason for her being liberated. This was a common charge made against the Christians by their heathen friends, both in public and in private, and every-day life,—not from tenderness and sympathy, to save them from danger, but from outrage and indignation at their "detestable obstinacy." The young Victoria, however, calmly and stedfastly avowed herself a Christian, and to the vehement protestations of her brother, she replied, "It is my firm and stedfast conviction—I have never changed." Agathoclia was a Christian slave in a household, of which the master had been converted to the faith of Christ, while his wife still continued a heathen, and entertained such strong and deep-rooted prejudices in favour of idolatry, that she could not rest contented till she had reclaimed the members of her family to the superstition of their fathers. Accordingly, she directed her utmost efforts daily to the accomplishment of this object; and when she found it impossible to make any impression on the mind of her husband, she made her assaults constantly on her poor dependent, Agathoclia,

in every form of command and menace. For about eight years she continued this system of domestic persecution, and when at length she saw that all her anxious labours were ineffectual, she ordered the slave, in a fit of ungovernable rage, to be put to death, with lingering tortures too horrible to relate.* Theophilus, the celebrated Bishop of Antioch, was the bosom-friend of Autolycus. From their earliest years they had lived in terms of the closest intimacy,—were inseparable companions, and being fond of the same studies, and cherishing the same tastes and sentiments, possessed all the qualifications that promised a lasting mutual attachment. Theophilus, however, became a Christian, and from that moment he found that his adoption of the religion of Jesus had completely alienated from him the friend of his early youth. Bitterly did he complain of the ungenerous conduct, and in a letter still extant, occasioned by this circumstance, he shows us what was the real cause of that discord and hatred which the profession of Christianity produced between the nearest friends. "Thou upbraidest me," says he, "with the name of Christian, as if it were something evil." The very name of Christian was so odious to the heathen, that it became a term expressive of the deepest degradation,—and so much did hostility to the title enter into all the proceedings against the followers of Jesus, that men who were chargeable with no crime against the laws of society, and who, if tried in a regular court of justice, would have been certainly acquitted of all imputations, were condemned and punished for no other offence than their bearing the obnoxious appellation. † The very lowest of the

^{*} Owners of slaves had anciently the power of life and death over them. † Lactantius, p. 30; Neander, p. 30; Watson's Apol., p. 316. The hostility to the name might arise from the strange and unaccountable attachment which the Christians showed for it. So much did they glory in it, that they often unnecessarily, and with great indiscretion, proclaimed it in presence of the heathen, and in contempt of the greatest dangers. Sanctus, one of the martyrs of Lyons, when interrogated by the governor what was his name, his country, his profession, and whether he was a freeman or a slave, answered all these questions simply by saying, that he was a Christian,—declaring that this title was country, profession, every thing to him.

people shrunk from the presence of a Christian, as if he would receive the worst contamination; they were ashamed to be seen speaking to him on the streets,and in the dungeons, in which the martyrs were confined with the most depraved criminals from all parts of the Roman world, "men-stealers, murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers,"-even these shunned their society, and looked on themselves as they were looked on by others, as felons less foul than those Christians.* When the celebrated martyr, Attalus, was carried through the amphitheatre, that he might be exposed to the derision of the populace before his execution, the crime for which he was condemned to die was written on a tablet, and fastened to his breast, "This is Attalus, the Christian." It was a proverb in common conversation, "Such a one is an excellent man, only he is a Christian;" or, "I wonder such a one, who is a wise man, could have become a Christian." "Wicked men from Palestine," is the designation usually given to the adherents of the Gospel in the first ages, and medals are still extant, which were struck in honour of the emperors, for having rid the empire of "robbers and Christians." † So completely were the bonds of society broken by the adoption of Christianity,—such implacable animosity against the Christians took possession even of the mildest and most humane of the heathens, that those who had long been inseparable and bosom companions, the moment either became a believer, were converted into the deadliest enemies,—the streams of parental affection and filial love were completely dried up,—the husband could not endure the company of his wife, and the wife was alienated from her husband. circle of his dearest and most venerated relatives, the

^{*} So odious was the name, that many persons who wished to avenge themselves of their enemies, or get rid of their relatives, falsely accused them of being Christians, to accomplish their certain ruin in society.— Lardner, vol. viii. p. 133.

[†] Ireland, p. 25; Cave's Prim. Christianity, p. 85; Neander, p. 156; Burton, p. 149.

follower of Jesus daily suffered martyrdom worse than a thousand deaths, living in perpetual fear, lest, if he should be detected to-day reading the Scriptures in his closet, or kneeling by his bed-side, the father under whose roof he lived, the mother who bore him, the brother who occupied the same apartment, or the slave who waited on his person, might denounce him to the tribunals to-morrow.

This stern opposition to the Gospel, no doubt, arose, in the first instance, from hatred to its pure spirit and lofty tone of morality, which, in all circumstances distasteful to the corrupt heart of man, could not fail, in a peculiar manner, to influence all the violent passions of a people who were inured to the most demoralizing habits, and wedded to the most grovelling pleasures of sense. As worldly and wicked men always dislike a doctrine that condemns their favourite lusts and habits, and enjoins strictness and purity of life, it was no wonder that the Gospel was most unwelcome to the ancient heathers,—that they made the greatest efforts to prevent its extension, and that the bitter spirit of opposition they manifested against it, was just in proportion to the greatness of their corruptions, and the inveterate hold which the old religion had obtained of their minds. The feelings of dislike and prejudice against the doctrine itself were naturally transferred to those who embraced it; and as light is not more opposite to darkness, the savage wolf not more dissimilar to the peaceful lamb, than true Christians are to all lovers of profligacy and perpetrators of crime, it was as natural for the latter, when they had the power, to abuse and persecute the holy followers of Christ, as it is for the ravenous beast of the forest to lie in wait for, and destroy the defenceless But the character of the persecutions carried on during the first ages against the Christians,—the bodily pains and penalties which were so relentlessly inflicted on them by the members of their own families,—the war of extermination which for nearly three centuries was waged against the very name, indicate the existence of some active secondary causes of opposition,—point to some peculiarities in the state of society and the maxims of government, as well as to the prevalence of ignorance and prejudice in the popular mind of no ordinary description; and accordingly, another source of trials to the primitive Christians arose from the numerous charges and horrid calumnies which ignorance propagated and prejudice believed against them. The consideration of these, not the least painful of the afflictions that befell the early believers, will form the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

CHRISTIANS ACCUSED OF INTRODUCING A NEW RELIGION—MANKIND NATURALLY AVERSE TO WHAT IS NEW—ROMANS PARTICULARLY JEALOUS OF ANY NOVELTIES IN RELIGION—CHRISTIANS ACCUSED OF HOLDING ILLEGAL ASSEMBLIES—OF FORMING CONSPIRACIES—THESE CHARGES FIRST AROSE FROM THEIR NOT PARTAKING IN PUBLIC REJOICINGS, AND FROM INDISCRETION OF SOME CHRISTIANS—ANECDOTES—CHRISTIANS ACCUSED OF BEING USELESS MEMBERS OF SOCIETY—OF BEING ATHEISTS—OF BEING THE OCCASION OF PUBLIC CALAMITIES—OF GROSS IMMORALITIES AND HORRID CRIMES—OF BEING POOR AND IGNORANT.

From the time when Paul was charged in the Senate of Athens with being a setter forth of strange gods, the cry was raised against the Christians of conspiring to abolish all ancient and venerable institutions; and the alarm taken by the Athenian philosophers was rapidly spread from one place to another, till the eye of suspicion every where fell on the followers of Christ, as men who wished to turn the world upside down. The accusation was, in its consequences, a formidable one, as it not only roused against them the dislike and opposition of those who were personally interested in the existing forms of worship, but alarmed that disposition which has ever been a powerful principle in the human mind, to cling with fond and reverend attachment to old observances. People become tenacious of customs the most trifling and worthless, which are familiar to them from habit,

and have existed from remote antiquity; and in nothing so much as in religion has this propensity discovered itself; mankind in all ages having deemed it a pious duty to continue every sacred observance which has age in its favour, and shown an invincible aversion to make the smallest deviation from the faith in which they were educated. In the bosoms of the ancient Gentiles as well as of the Jews, there reigned the strongest prepossessions in favour of the traditions of their fathers; and it was with mingled feelings of surprise and horror, they looked upon the followers of the new sect as entertaining the sacrilegious design of uprooting all they were taught to believe as true, and reverence as sacred. Ignorant of Christianity, and careless in inquiring whether it was true or not, they were violently inflamed against it, on the ground of its being a departure from all the established forms of worship in the world; and the very first and most contemptuous objection that was thrown in the face of the primitive Christians, was the novelty of the doctrine. "Where was your religion a few years ago?" was a question with which their heathen contemporaries constantly taunted them. nowhere heard of: whereas ours," said they, "has from time immemorial been the prevailing form of religion; it has descended through a long series of ages, as an inheritance from our fathers; it has the sanction of legislators, the opinions of philosophers, and the authority of oracles in its favour; and under its auspices we have enjoyed every degree of prosperity we can desire, both for ourselves, our families, and our nation. Why, then, should we abandon a form of religion in which we have been bred, to which we are attached, and which, moreover, has been adopted in all countries and cities, by Greeks and barbarians, for new and foreign rites which are but of yesterday's growth?"* To this loose and popular argument, which was gravely

^{*} Eusebius Hist. Eccles., p. 4.

urged in defence of their superstitions, it was in vain that the Christians retorted, that religion was to be judged of, not by its antiquity, but its truth,—that it was reasonable and proper to change old institutions, when better ones were offered,—and that, while such strong and convincing proofs were adduced to attest the truth of Christianity, it was foolish to object to it on account of its being a new religion. us," said Clemens Alexandrinus, in a curious specimen of the arguments employed against their contemporaries by the primitive Christians, "that it is an impious and unpardonable offence to depart from the customs which your fathers have transmitted, and yet you are daily acting in other respects in opposition to your own principles. If it is wrong to change things from what they are, why do you not continue all your days to live on the nurse's milk which formed your first and only food? why do you leave the toys and amusements of infancy and childhood for the grave occupations of mature age? why do you pull down your houses to build new ones, and extend the boundaries of your estate beyond what you received from your fathers?" In a similar strain of forcible and ironical argument, Ambrose said, "You cast up to us that our way of religion is new, while yours is very ancient. But what does this either weaken our cause or assist yours? If ours be new, it will in time become old. Is yours old? There was a time when it was new. The excellence and authority of religion is not to be valued by length of time, but by the reasonableness and advantages of its worship, nor ought it so much to be a matter of consideration when it began as what it is we worship." * To the same effect the great Lactantius wrote,—" You object to us the lateness of our religion, and maintain, that we should invariably abide by what our ancestors approved. But we find that they were far from

^{*} Cave's Prim. Christ., part i. chap. ii.

continuing in the same unvarying state. They rose gradually from their original state of poverty and meanness to the comforts and splendour of artificial life. Was it wrong in them to exchange their skins of beasts for decent and convenient garments, and their mud cottages, or habitations in caves of the earth, for stately and spacious houses? And, if it was no harm to deviate from the ancient usages of their ancestors in matters of temporal and civil life, it surely implied no greater want of respect for their wisdom to change and improve on their forms of religion." Besides, it was frequently and earnestly pleaded by the Christians, that as the great and sole object of their worship was the Maker and Sovereign of heaven and of earth, who was before all creatures and all things, their religion, instead of being but of yesterday, as was contemptuously alleged, was as old as the creation of man, and the principles and duties inculcated in it were such as reason and conscience approved. All their arguments and pleadings, however, were of no avail in silencing the opposition of the heathen, who never spoke, but with the most contemptuous sneers, of Jesus as the Author of the new religion, and of the Christians as the new sect, which, having sprung from an obscure and barbarous country, had spread themselves over the world with the view of introducing their new doctrines and new customs every where. It is impossible to convey an idea of the bitter feelings that were entertained towards a class of men who felt-and gloried in expressing—contempt for the religious notions and rites of their contemporaries. Had they merely introduced a foreign worship, without disturbing the heathen in the enjoyment of theirs, that toleration which idolaters always showed to the religious customs of others, would have been freely extended to them, and that respect would have been testified for their religion, which, by the common consent of all

antiquity, always attached to those who religiously observed the customs of their ancestors. It was thus that the heathens countenanced the Jews in their adherence to the ritual of Moses, for however absurd and contemptible they reckoned the worship of that people, their devoted attachment to the faith of their forefathers was imputed to feelings, which it was deemed a sacred duty to honour, and the highest criminality to violate. But in the Christians they saw a set of men, who, not only in Palestine, the place of their origin, trampled on the customs which their Jewish countrymen had immemorially reverenced and observed, but who, in every country, set themselves in opposition to all the notions which education had instilled, and habit familiarized,—who not only objected to the religion of Egypt and Syria, but could as little endure the sacred institutions of Rome and Athens; and, while they witnessed and spoke of the deities and rites of polytheism with undisguised and unqualified feelings of horror, they showed, that in no form, and under no modification, could they reckon it lawful to engage in a thing so sinful. As every province, city, and household, had their own proper deities and their own peculiar rites, all joined in the common complaint and animosity against the Christians, who had begun to live after a new fashion, spurning the time-hallowed observances of their family and their birth-place.* And, as the religious ceremonies of the heathen were so blended with the affairs of everyday life, that whoever abstained from them could not avoid the appearance of singularity in his language and manners; the studied avoidance of the Christians from participating in many of the most ordinary usages of society, was not only remarked as strange, but sometimes violently resented as insulting,

^{* &}quot;Those are extremely silly and foolish," says Celsus, "who suppose that Greeks and barbarians in Asia and Europe, and various parts of the world, can ever unite in the same system of religion."

by the friends with whom they associated, and the

circles in which they found themselves.*

The newness of the Christian worship was the chief cause of the opposition of the Romans. That people were jealous of all innovations in religion; and, although it was a favourite maxim of their policy, to the observance of which they attributed their universal prosperity, to enrol among the gods of the empire the deities of all the people whom they conquered, yet no foreign object of worship was ever admitted into the Pantheon, without a special enactment of the Senate. Religion with them was entirely an engine of State; and, as the regulations that related to it formed part and parcel of the general code of the empire, the least deviation from the established ceremonies of worship was regarded as a violation of the laws. Some of their greatest statesmen had pronounced it as a fundamental principle of Roman government, that no individual should have separate gods or separate worship for himself. Many of the ancient philosophers, who saw through the absurdities of the popular superstition, deemed it expedient and necessary to inculcate a strict compliance with the sacred customs of the country; and, in the celebrated speech of Mæcenas to Augustus, that eminent minister, though a man of no religion himself, recommended it to his imperial master to detect and punish all who introduced foreign religions, † not only out of respect to the gods, but from fear of the strange customs and practices that might arise from them. "He did not," as Lord Hailes justly remarks, "counsel the maintenance of the old worship as a reasonable service, or the extirpation of Christianity as being a false religion, but he approved of the one because it was old and in possession; and he reprobated the

^{*} Origen, lib. v. p. 247; Hailes' Minucius Felix, p. 14; Fleury, Mœurs des Chretiens, p. 218.

[†] Hailes' Disquisitions, p. 157.

other, because it was a novelty."* It was on this principle, that all the emperors and politicians of Rome, during the first three centuries, proceeded,they saw that Christianity was a new religion, and opposed to the established form of worship; and, therefore, as they could not incorporate Christ and his doctrine with the prevailing system of idolatry, because the Christians peremptorily refused to comply, they were led, according to all their notions of expediency, to persecute and suppress it as an innovation on the faith and worship of the empire. Besides, the assemblies of the Christians, which were held once at least every week, and frequently every day, and at which, from the increasing progress of the Gospel, great numbers congregated, were another cause of offence against the Christians. " It is well known," to use the words of the eloquent Gibbon, "that Roman policy viewed with the utmost distrust and jealousy, any association among its subjects, and the privileges of private corporations, though formed for the most harmless and beneficial purposes, were bestowed with a very sparing hand. The emperor Trajan refused to incorporate a company of 150 firemen for the use of the city of Nicomedia. disliked all associations." † Though the Christian assemblies were of a totally different character from those against which the prohibitory laws were issued, and the followers of Christ never meddled with political matters, they were accused of holding illegal assemblies, and of forming secret conspiracies to overturn the empire and bring the State to ruin. admirable love and charity which they cherished for one another was considered the bond of a deep and extensive combination. The tokens of affection with which they welcomed Christian strangers, before they

^{*} Hailes' Disquisitions, p. 150. This speech, which Dio Cassius ascribes to Mæcenas, is probably fictitious, but it embodies the sentiments of Roman statesmen.

[†] Decline and Fall, xv.

were personally known to them, were misinterpreted into the watchword of the party. Their alms were regarded as means of seducing the poor, and drawing them to join their cabal. Their miracles were traduced as the most odious species of magic,—the general society of Christians was vilified as a degraded company of charlatans, who predicted future events by different kinds of divination, and healed diseases by the use of enchantments and barbarous words,—their demeanour and proceedings were suspected of political aims, by the jealous spirit of despotism,—while the strong and general persuasion which prevailed among them, that the end of the world and the day of judgment were near at hand, was considered an indication of hostility to the Roman government,

and of an extreme desire for its destruction.

What gave greater colour and reality to these charges was, that they declined to take any part in the public rejoicings with which the Romans celebrated the success of their arms. As these festive occasions were always signalized by an extraordinary pomp of sacrifices—by public shows, which were scenes of unbridled debauchery—and by various manifestations of idolatry, the Christians not only kept aloof from them, but devoted those seasons to more than ordinary fasting and prayer, on account of the gross iniquities which were then perpetrated by the empire. They even avoided frequenting fairs, on account of the criminal and disgusting sports for which those scenes were infamous; and if they ever repaired to them, it was solely for the purpose of procuring some indispensable article of personal or family comfort, or purchasing a young slave to train him in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But to the Campus Martius, where feats of agility and strength were performed-to the amphitheatre, where all sorts of shows were exhibited—to any of the favourite haunts of social amusement, in which the ancient Greeks

and Romans spent so much of their time, and the encouragement of which was reckoned a part of the public duties of the magistrate, they would, on no account, be prevailed on to go. They avoided and abhorred all these as essentially sinful in their character, or dangerous from the temptations there presented; and instead of mingling with the great body of their countrymen in those out-of-doors pastimes, they secluded themselves at home or in their secret meetings -mourning, while all the world around them was engaged in festivity, and rejoicing on the days which the superstitious heathens regarded as gloomy and unfortunate from those disastrous events in their national history that had happened at such times. They were looked upon as enemies of their country, destitute of all patriotic feelings, insensible to the glory of the empire, and from their constant and, to the heathens, strange, observations on the vanity of earthly grandeur, as anxious for the end of the world, which was another word for the overthrow of Rome,only to realize their dreams of future and imaginary happiness in heaven.

Innocent though the great body of Christians were of all charges of political crimes, it must be acknowledged that some of them, through indiscretion in their language and manners, did afford some ground of suspicion that they were meditating secret designs, which threatened the stability and welfare of the State. Many, on their examination before the heathen tribunals, allowed their passion to get the better of their prudence, denouncing threats and judgments upon the governors and the empire, as drunk with the blood of the saints; while others, employing in their answers the metaphorical language of Scripture to signify their desire and hopes of a better country, and a more perfect kingdom, incautiously gave a pretext for the charges of political aims that were industriously made against them. Procopius, for instance, the

first of the martyrs of Palestine, on being summoned into the presence of the governor, and commanded to offer incense to the gods, replied, that he acknowledged only one God, whom he was bound to worship with such sacrifices as He had appointed. When afterwards required to make libations to the four emperors, he said in the words of Homer, "the government of many rulers is not good; let there be only one governor, one king." This quotation, which he meant to apply in a spiritual sense, and to God as his supreme governor, who alone had claims to be worshipped by sacrifice, was interpreted by the judge in a literal sense, and as treasonable to the reigning monarch. Procopius, as a convicted traitor, was ordered for execution. A young Egyptian, when apprehended and brought before the Roman proconsul at Cæsarea, being asked what was his country, replied, that it was Jerusalem, the native country of the pious, lying in the East, and towards the rising of the sun. The governor, receiving to all his interrogations nothing but the same answer, was greatly perplexed, and knowing, probably, little of the earthly Jerusalem, which went then only by its new name of Ælia Capitolina, and having far less knowledge of the heavenly, imagined that there could be no doubt but the Christians were about to establish a city in opposition to the empire of Rome, and set himself to institute the most anxious inquiries concerning that territory in the East, which the Egyptian had spoken of.* From these and other instances of imprudence which sometimes occurred, the accusation of being deeply concerned in mischievous plots against the Roman government probably took its rise. But a great variety of circumstances conspired to prepare the minds of men for entertaining and bringing such charges against them; some invented them from malice, others propagated them from ignorance or fear; and among all the serious

^{*} Eusebius, Martyrs of Palestine, chap. xi. Ibid., chap. i.

charges that were groundlessly circulated against the first followers of Christ, there was none calculated to be a source of greater trials to them, than the accusation

of being enemies to the State.

Akin to this charge, another and a very common one was, that of being useless members of society. This accusation seems to have been founded on the very serious and spiritual habits of the early believers, who dedicated almost all their leisure time to exercises of devotion, and whose conscientious scruples forbade them to purchase many of those works of art and articles of spicery which were much in use among their heathen contemporaries, or to undertake any of those civil and military offices which were in any way connected with idolatry. And as the calumny was circulated with malicious industry, it proved a source of very grievous distress to the Christians, rousing, as it did, against them, not only the hostility of those immense multitudes of their countrymen, whose livelihood arose from merchandise connected with the popular superstitions, but drawing upon them often the imperial suspicion and vengeance, as a class of men who displayed a criminal disregard to the public The utter groundlessness of the charge, however, was shown by the circumstance, that the Christians did not withdraw, like hermits, from the world, and pass their lives in inactive solitude, but were as diligent in working at their trades, in using the common articles of consumption and luxury, in mingling in the general intercourse of society, and partaking of all innocent and lawful pleasures, as any portion of their countrymen. "How can we be useless and unserviceable to the State," says Tertullian, with characteristic force and eloquence; "we are no Brahmins, nor Indian gymnosophists, who live in the depth of forests or in sequestered wildernesses; we are sensible of our obligations to our Creator, and despise none of the good things which he bestows, though

we are careful to use them with temperance and sobriety. We make use of the same things as others do,—the same markets, shambles, baths, taverns, shops, and other places of social intercourse. to sea, dig and cultivate the ground, occupy ourselves as merchants, exercise all mechanical arts, dispose of our manufactures, like other men; and how, then, can we be less serviceable to those among whom we live? None have any cause of complaint against us, but publicans, ruffians, venders of poison, magicians, soothsayers, wizards, and astrologers, the profits of which men, as well as their occupations, must be hurtful to the State." * In short, acting upon the sacred rule, "that every man should abide in the calling wherein he was called," the Christians showed that their religion sanctified all the lawful occupations of life, and taught them, that so far from being inconsistent with its spirit and principles to engage in the affairs of the world, it was their duty and their glory to honour God in the useful discharge of them; to be diligent in business, and, by the fruits of industry, "to provide things honest in the sight of all men." There were some, indeed, who thought it unlawful to follow a soldier's profession; and there were many who, while they felt themselves perfectly at liberty to enter both into military and civil employments, yet declined doing so on account of the oaths that were then imposed at entrance, and the various idolatrous ceremonies that happened to be connected with them. The fault of a few, or the refusal of many, on the ground of conscientious scruples from these accidental circumstances, was immediately imputed as a charge against the whole body of believers, who were vilified as a set of men holding sentiments which disqualified all who embraced them for the discharge of the most necessary and important duties of social life, and which, if they obtained a general circulation,

^{*} Tertullian's Apol., chap. xlii.

would inevitably weaken the hands of government, and expose the empire to become the prey of every invader. This objection, which, in the first ages, was constantly thrown out against the Christians, is insisted upon at great length by their learned opponent, Celsus. "Does not the emperor justly punish you?" says he, "for if all were to conduct themselves as you, his majesty would be left alone, -no one would assist him in matters of State, -no one would defend him with his sword. If riches and honours are to be condemned as worthless, or avoided as sinful,—if men are to submit with mean and pusillanimous tameness to every insult, and expose their throat or their cheek to every ruffian who threatens to attack them, society could not exist,—the government would be at a stand, or run into inextricable confusion, and hordes of barbarians would soon usurp dominion, and tyrannize over an unresisting people."* To this calumny it was triumphantly answered, that it proceeded from gross ignorance of the Gospel, and a perverse interpretation of the precepts, which forbid riches and honours being made a primary pursuit, and the indulgence of revenge a leading principle of action, to infer that no man was to defend his life and property when in danger, or devote his natural and acquired abilities to the public service. Besides, as the grand object of the Gospel was to produce a moral reform in the heart of man,—the more its principles were imbibed and its power was felt, society would be refined and purified from every abuse, order would be established, industry promoted,—all those violent and disorderly passions would be subdued and banished, which lead to fraud and injustice, to private oppression, or to public wars,—rational freedom and universal tranquillity would reign among men, and those who acted under the genuine influence of Christianity, would be found the most active servants of the public, the most dili-

^{*} Celsus, book viii.

gent in the duties of private life, the most virtuous and useful characters in every State. In confirmation of this, they appealed to the well-known facts, that many of their number were, during the whole of the first three centuries, found both in the court and in the camp; that some Christians of rank filled honourable stations in the households of the emperors, and that although the profession of arms might well, in those days of unjust wars and insatiable love of conquest, be supposed uncongenial to their feelings and habits, yet many complied with the call of duty to enlist, and proved themselves among the bravest defenders of the life and crown of the emperor. Thus, in refutation of the bitter and calumnious invectives of their enemies, that they were useless and unserviceable, the Christians showed that they were as capable of performing all the offices of public and private life,-nay, that they were even better qualified to carry on the business and improve the habits of society, than any other class of citizens. "Inquire," says Origen, "into the lives of some of us; compare our former and our present manner of living, and you will perceive to what impurities and impieties many were habituated before they adopted our principles. But ever since they embraced them, how just and honest, how virtuous and regular they are become, -husbands are most exemplary in their attention to their wives, parents are most dutiful to their families, masters kind and considerate to their servants, and servants faithful to the trust, and indefatigable in the service, of their masters. How can these, therefore, be useless and pestilent members of society, who have reclaimed multitudes from the grossest habits of vice to a life of temperance and virtue, who set an example to all of frugality, moderation and industry, who refuse only to countenance extravagance, quarrelling, and debauchery?" *

^{*} Origen against Celsus, book i.

Again, the Christians were vehemently accused of disloyalty, because they would neither swear by the genius of the emperor, nor give religious homage to his statues. Among the extravagant arts of flattery which, in the latter days of the empire, the Romans introduced, was that of ranking their rulers in the number of demi-gods, offering sacrifices to their images, and bestowing upon them, even while living, all the honours they were accustomed to render to divinities. There were stated periods appointed for the annual celebration of these rites in honour of the occupant of the throne,—but there were many other times, such as the return of the anniversary of his accession, the achievement of a victory, or the performance of any very popular act, in which the servile people were ever ready to renew the incense of their adulation, and marked their joy on such festive occasions, by ceasing from all serious business, and giving themselves up to the careless enjoyment of every species of pleasure. Some, from morning to night, waited on the brutal shows of the amphitheatre, while others betook themselves to the more harmless and elegant pastime of decorating their houses with laurel, or illuminating them with torches, while, during the whole day, all classes were eager to demonstrate their loyalty, by swearing by the genius of the emperor at every word, in their ordinary conversation, and frequently presenting themselves at his shrine, to give the usual token of obeisance. The Christians did neither. Not one of them was to be seen at the base of the imperial statue, nor was the oath of loyalty ever heard to come from Christian lips, nor ever a branch of laurel, nor a solitary torch, known to enliven a Christian dwelling. Nay, it was even remarked that on such occasions, when all the world was rejoicing, when every house was a scene of gaiety, and every person bent on merriment and sport, the believers fell back into more than their usual grave and solemn demeanour.

Suspicion, therefore, strongly attached to them that they were disloyal, and a charge of treason was fastened on the whole body of the followers of Christ, that they were the enemies of Cæsar and of the Roman people. It was in vain that they protested against it as an unfounded calumny,-declared that they could not swear by the genius, or pay divine honours to the image of the emperor, because such acts of idolatry to a fellow-mortal, however dignified, were a violation of the first precept of the law given by the one true and living God. It was in vain that they appealed to their daily habit of praying for long life to the emperor, and prosperity to the State,—to their exemplary fidelity, and exactness in the payment of tribute, and their submission to all the civil laws and institutions of the empire. The ears of the emperor and his deputies were preoccupied by the charge of their disaffection, and want of the customary respect to the symbols of royalty; and no protestations of their firm and dutiful allegiance could free them from the odium of being a class of men with whom it was a hereditary principle to refuse its stated honours to the crown.

A charge of even a more heinous and aggravated description than disloyalty and disaffection to the emperor, was made against the primitive Christians. Men who lived and breathed in an atmosphere of pure and exalted devotion, were charged with impiety, and they, whose every action, and every enjoyment, was hallowed by a recognition of the presence, and an invocation of the blessing of God, were denounced as Atheists. They had openly renounced all the existing forms of worship in the empire. Instead of the thirty thousand deities adored by the Pagans, they worshipped but one; and that one they would not, even although the refusal might cost them their lives, allow themselves to blaspheme by giving him the name of Jupiter, the reputed father and king of the gods. Many of the Christians, instead of contenting themselves with a calm

and resolute avoidance of every thing connected with idolatry, imprudently manifested their contempt for it, spit upon the images, ran past the temples as fast as they could for fear of pollution, scoffed at their worship, and ridiculed their votaries. But this was done only by a few imprudent and enthusiastic sectaries. great body of Christians abstained from every appearance of insult on the superstition of their heathen neighbours, but showed a firm determination to shun all participation in any of its forms and observances. At the same time, they exhibited in their rejection of all the existing rights of religion, no visible proofs of having substituted any thing else in their place. Every people under the sun, whether Greek or barbarian, could boast of places consecrated to the solemnities or adorned with appropriate emblems of their worship. Even the Jews, amid all the peculiarities of their strange and unsocial faith, had reared a magnificent edifice in honour of their Deity, in which was a sacred crypt for his special residence. But the Christians had displayed no temples, no altars, no images,none of all the common and established accompaniments of religion; in consequence of which they were looked upon with feelings of the greatest horror and aversion, as Atheists, by the heathen. minds of the vulgar could not entertain the sublime idea of a God, who was represented by no visible image, and worshipped under no corporeal form,—a God, whose nature was spiritual, and whose presence was universal. Nor could the philosophers, notwithstanding their boast of having arrived at the knowledge of the Great First Cause, more easily than the rest of the people, reconcile themselves to a worship that made no appeal to the senses. Any little perception their careless and contemptuous glance at Christianity might have given them of the grand principle of the divine unity inculcated by that religion, appeared to them mixed up with so much enthusiasm

as repelled them from a closer investigation of the Gospel; and perceiving the Christians, while they recoiled from paying divine honours to the shades of departed heroes and legislators, who had benefited the world by their victories, their inventions, or their counsels, worshipping as their God a man who had died the ignominious death of a felon, they branded them with the imputation of atheism in its worst and most revolting form. From the very infancy of Christianity, this calumny against its disciples was extensively circulated in the heathen world. emperor Domitian put multitudes of Christians to death, and confiscated their estates, on pretext of atheism. By the ancient wits and satirists, whose works have descended to our times, the followers of Christ are invariably classed with Atheists and Epicureans; and, in spite of all the asseverations they made, that they worshipped one God, the Maker of heaven and earth, whose being and providence they demonstrated by the clearest arguments,—in spite of all their solemn protestations that in their sacred assemblies they adored him, by singing praises to his Majesty, and by supplicating his mercy and his love, and that, in their whole conduct, they studied to conform their lives to His will,—in spite of all their elaborate apologies, in which they proved that Christ was God manifest in the flesh, the calumny still stuck to them; "the atheism" was the infamous appellation by which their society was designated, and themselves were held up to the universal reprobation of the public, as the vilest of men and the enemies of the gods.*

From the foregoing calumny there naturally sprung another charge, which ever and anon burst out against the primitive Christians—that they were the occasion of all the public calamities with which the empire was visited during the first three centuries. As every

^{*} Cave's Prim. Christ., part i. chap. 1; Minucius Felix, p. 20; Justin Martyr, Apol., p. 56.

state, province, and city, was supposed to have its own guardian deity, who presided over its interests and secured its prosperity, the practice of the Romans had always been, on the conquest of a new people, to enrol their gods in the Pantheon-to erect statues and institute rites to their honour, and that people were in the habit of ascribing to this prudent and conciliating policy, their prolonged and universal supremacy over the world. The leading statesmen of the time, therefore, looked on Christianity, which proclaimed war against all the objects and forms of idolatry, as striking at a fundamental principle in the constitution of the empire; and the people, after the example of their rulers, learnt to attribute all the disastrous events which happened, whether in the natural or political hemisphere, to the anger of the gods on account of the apostasy of the Christians.* The reception of present and temporal benefits was all that the Pagans wished for or expected from their gods; and this hope of securing temporal prosperity for adherence to the national worship, seems to have increased in proportion as the empire declined, and the evils multiplied which led to its fall. By those misfortunes, the spirit of paganism was excited to vengeance, and the Romans, who flattered themselves that they owed the long-continued prosperity of their empire to the special favour of the gods, charged the reverses of fortune, which they latterly experienced, on the departure of a vast body of the people from the observance of the ancient worship. They clung to idolatry with more tenacious fondness than ever-magnified the benefits which they had derived from the faith of their fathers, † and represented the calamities, which

• It is evident from Tertullian's Apology, that this accusation was very strong and general in his time.—Chap. 26.

[†] The heathen, before this time, were often incensed at their gods, and expressed their disappointed feelings in a very extraordinary manner, at the calamities which they brought upon their worshippers. For instance, when Augustus, during the Sicilian war, lost two of his fleets by storms, he is said to have taken his revenge upon Neptune, by not suffering him

in frightful number and variety befell the empire, as the necessary consequence of the desertion of the national worship. The gods, they said, offended by the defection of so many of the people, had withdrawn from their natural care of the destinies of the empire, and displayed their altered feelings towards mankind, by the infliction of calamitics, some of which were hitherto unknown, and all of which had been but

rarely heard of at any former period.

The existence and extent of this complaint appears, for the first time, in a memorable rescript of Antoninus Pius to his subjects in Asia, in which, stating his views of a persecution of the Christians which had begun there, the emperor recommends the Pagans not to take vengeance into their own hands, but to leave all who neglected or despised the worship of the gods to the visitation of Heaven itself; and it is remarkable that, from the time of issuing that imperial letter, the practice gained ground, and ever afterwards continued, of ascribing misfortunes of all sorts to the resentment of the gods for the insults which the Christians offered to their name. Although the outbursts of popular fury were occasionally checked by the predominance of better and more peaceful counsels, yet, from the reign of that emperor, we find the feelings of the heathen, at the rapid progress of Christianity, constantly breaking out into some manifestation of alarm; and the writings of all the early fathers afford the strongest proofs, that every evil inherent in the condition of man was imputed to the prevalence of the Christian religion, and looked upon as a judgment on its professors. In the declining age of the empire, misfortunes of every kind were experienced; and the people, unwilling or unable, from gross igno-

to be carried in procession with the other gods at the Circensian games. And when the beloved Germanicus died, the people of Rome were so enraged, that they stoned the very temples of the gods, and overthrew the altars; while some flung their household divinities into the streets.—Ireland's Lecture, p. 53.

rance, to discover, or from mere servility, to admit, the real causes, were in the habit of tracing them to the vast number of people who, under the name of Christians, had forsaken the temples, and neglected the worship of the gods. As often as those calamities occurred, they took vengeance on the unfortunate Christians as the guilty cause. Thus, in the united reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the soldiers, on their return from their Eastern campaign under the latter, brought with them a pestilential disease of a most malignant nature. Infection spread far and wide in the capital. The mortality was most alarming,—few families escaped without the loss of one or more of their members; and the utmost indignation prevailed during the continuance of the plague, against the Christians, whose insults on their worship, it was supposed, the gods were resenting by that terrible visitation. * In the year 168, an extraordinary flood had swelled the Tiber so far beyond its customary channel, that the impetuous current not only swept away numerous bridges, but destroyed many buildings, among which were the public granaries,—a severe famine ensued, which was revenged in many places by the ebullition of popular feeling against the Christians. In the year 180, the whole of Italy suffered from a grievous famine. The scarcity of food was severely and extensively felt,-multitudes in all ranks of the people dying of absolute starvation. Many public buildings also were destroyed by alarming fires, both in Rome and the provincial cities; insomuch, that by these united calamities, the minds of the populace were violently inflamed against the Christians. † During the reign of Maximin the Thracian, in the year 244, repeated shocks of earthquakes happened in Asia Minor. Whole towns were swallowed up in some places, stately and massive buildings were laid in ruins in others, and the inhabitants, thrown into

^{*} Burton's Lect., p. 132.

the utmost consternation, lived day and night entirely in the fields. All eyes—not only of the common people, but even of the better and more reflecting orders-were turned upon the Christians as the guilty cause of the catastrophe; their houses were attacked and pillaged, their churches levelled with the ground, and themselves driven to the solitudes of the mountains. * On the accession of Gallus to the empire, in 252, a most fatal pestilence had been raging for some years; and so strong and universal was the disposition among the contemporary Pagans to ascribe such visitations to the anger of Heaven, that we find even the philosophic Porphyry venting the complaint, that since the spread of the Christian doctrine, neither Æsculapius, nor any other god, had given his wonted assistance to Rome. Long afterwards, on the occasion of a pestilence in the time of the imperial monster, Maximin, about 312, that prince, in answer to a petition from the inhabitants of Tyre, dilated on the many gratifying proofs the gods were then giving of their satisfaction at the persecution and the prospective extinction, as he contemplated, of the Christian faith. He mentioned, in particular, the salubrity of the season,—the luxuriance of the harvest,—the total absence of pestilence and earthquake,—the prevalence of universal peace,—and the absence of the manifold calamities which had pressed so heavily on all parts of the empire, when pacific measures were pursued towards the Christians, but which had so remarkably disappeared on the commencement of hostilities against them. † "The Pagan reasoners of those early days," to use the words of a learned writer, to whom we have been much indebted for the illustration of this favourite calumny against the Christians, "dated the origin of all the disasters of the empire from the inauspicious birth of Christianity. Bellona

^{*} Origen: Hom. on Matt. xxviii.; Neander, p. 129. † Euseb. Hist. Eccles., ix. 8.

became averse from her once favourite people, and engaged them in hostilities longer and more bloody than before. The elements themselves partook in promoting the Divine resentment, and either lost their wholesome qualities, or purposely confounded them. Nay, the minutest creatures, capable of destroying or infesting the means of human subsistence, were secretly instigated to a rival mischief, that revenge might be more convincingly and variously taken on the contemners of the gods. All evil was supposed to come in the train of the Gospel; and inordinate bloodshed, pestilence, drought, famine, and tempests, to be its proper consequences. Christianity invited the swarms of locusts,-Christianity encouraged the depredations of the vermin." * To the same purpose, Tertullian, in an eloquent passage of his Apology, which Gibbon has condescended to appropriate, says, -"If a city be besieged-if any thing happen unfortunately in the fields, in the garrisons, in the islands, forthwith they cry out, 'It is on account of the Christians.' They conspire the ruin of good men, and thirst after the blood of the innocent, patronizing their hatred with the vain pretext, that the Christians are the cause of all public misfortunes and calamities. If the Tiber overflow the walls—if the Nile do not, according to its custom, inundate the plains of Egypt —if the heaven do not keep its accustomed course if an earthquake happen—if a famine or a plague immediately an outcry is raised, 'Away with the Christians to the lions." Thus were the poor, innocent, and holy followers of Christ in primitive times, made the scape-goats for all the offences of mankind, —offered as victims on the altar of a blind superstition, with the view of averting calamities, many of which were brought, in the natural course of Providence, on a luxurious and corrupt people, who had wellnigh filled up the measure of their iniquities.

^{*} Ireland's Lect., p. 61.

[†] Tertullian's Apol., chap. i.

The Pagans, blindly attached to their own worship, and taught to regard the Christians as enemies of the gods, were naturally led to ascribe every evil, of whatever kind, that occurred in any part of the empire, to the vast number of apostates, whom every day was adding to the ranks of Christianity. The disposition once acquired became a settled habit, and it affords a curious example of the blind partiality and deceitfulness of the human mind in overlooking its own faults, and detecting the worst offences in others, as well as of that tendency which mankind in all ages have shown, to mourn over the present times as degenerate and bad, and to dwell with pleasing retrospect on the past, as a period when existing corruptions and evils were entirely unknown. Several works of considerable magnitude, and of a most learned character, were composed by Christian writers for the express purpose of repelling the invidious charge against the disciples of Christianity. It is unnecessary to mention more than the celebrated work of Augustine,—" The City of God,"—and that of his presbyter Orosius, the design of which was, to compile from all former histories and annals, whatever calamities, common or extraordinary, natural or civil, were recorded for the experience of mankind. Nor was this undertaken through the melancholy love of contemplating a mass of human evil, but for the sake of convincing the Roman people, that the disasters of which they complained, as unexampled in their nature, and entailed on their own age and nation by the malignant influence of Christianity, were long since familiar, not only to the rest of the world, but to themselves, *

One should have imagined it was scarcely possible for the enemies of the primitive Christians to carry their inventive malice beyond the accusations we have now been adverting to,—accusations which, whether

^{*} Ireland's Lect., p. 75.

they referred to innovations in religion, or impiety in practice,—to their being an unlawful and dangerous combination, or their being the guilty cause of the calamities that afflicted the world, were calculated to cover the Christian name with universal and indelible infamy. But those charges, heavy and serious as they were, were light and trivial in comparison of the gross calumny affecting their moral character, which we now proceed to consider; and it remains a very striking proof at once of the careless ignorance of the heathen respecting the real principles and views of the Christians, and of the deeply prejudiced state of the popular mind, when malice could invent, and suspicious credulity believe, imputations against them, so revolting to humanity, and carrying, by their very heinousness, an air of improbability on the face of them. This calumny against the Christians arose from the time and manner of holding their social assemblies, and from some peculiarities in the solemn rites of their worship, of which distorted or ill-understood reports had got into wide circulation. It was the custom of the early believers to meet for religious purposes in a very secret manner, and in the night,-such a clandestine celebration of their worship having been at first forced upon them by fear of their Jewish and Pagan oppressors, and afterwards continued, as well perhaps from habit as from a laudable desire to conform as nearly as possible to the first institution of the Lord's Supper as a divine model. As the dark and silent hour of midnight is seldom chosen for assembling large bodies of people, except when their objects are so unworthy and criminal as to require profound concealment, the stolen meetings of the Christians were not long in awakening the worst suspicions of their enemies, who, knowing well, that on those occasions, when the rites of their own superstition were hid in impenetrable mystery from the eyes of public observation, the most abominable atrocities

-the most unnatural crimes were perpetrated, were led to impute the same odious designs to the new sect of the Christians, and to presume, that what was so studiously done under favour of the darkness, was similar in character to the gross and unbridled licentiousness of which the temples of Ceres and Bacchus were the infamous scenes. These foul suspicions, which were suggested by their own guilty knowledge, that the grossest excesses had often been committed under the venerable sanction of religion, were apparently strengthened by some unhappy coincidences, -by the revelations made of the conduct of the Marcionites, Carpocratians, and other Gnostics, who assumed the Christian name, and confessed with unblushing effrontery to the practising of the most incredible impurities,—and by the suspicious testimony of some slaves who, under fear of the torture, told the most horrid tales of what they had seen in the household of their Christian masters, and of what they knew was nightly transacted in the churches of the Christians. The charge was this: That at the ceremony of initiating a new convert into the mysteries of the Christian society, an infant, disguised in a mass of paste, was presented to the proselyte, who, with a knife or bodkin in his hand, and in ignorance of the real nature of the object before him, was required to pierce several times violently into the crust. By means of this, the child received mortal wounds, which were soon announced to the initiated by the streams of blood that oozed from the cake. reeking fluid, caught in basons, was greedily drank by every one of the bystanders, who at the same time breaking the paste, and tearing asunder the quivering limbs it had hitherto concealed, devoured the horrid morsel—thus binding themselves by a solemn pledge to mutual secrecy. This disgusting ceremony being finished, the brethren partook of a social entertainment, at which men and women, parents and chil-

dren, brothers and sisters, sat down, and after having eaten and drank without restraint, at the time when their hearts were merry and their passions inflamed with excess of wine, a dog was tied to the solitary lamp that lighted the chamber, and some tempting sop having been placed within his reach, and close to the lamp, he was made to spring suddenly, by which he overturned the light and involved the whole assembly in darkness. That was the signal for the indulgence of the most brutal appetites, and the perpetration of atrocities of which nature abhors the idea.* It is impossible to read without the deepest emotion, an accusation of so gross and so incredible a nature, which was industriously circulated and seriously believed to the prejudice of our ancestors in the faith. Such was the horror and contempt which the belief of it engendered for all who bore the name of Christian, that they were counted "the off-scouring of all things." Men were ashamed, and often refused to speak on the streets to their nearest relations and friends, when they became Christians,—the mere profession of that odious name was considered enough to condemn the holder of it, and a universal feeling of indignation was created against the whole body, which would have led to proceedings even more violent than any which public authority ever commenced against them, had not another impression gained ground, that the perpetrators of crimes of such magnitude should be left to the sure and signal vengeance of Heaven itself. The Jews were, as usual, the principal authors and propagators of this calumny, and the charge, which arose at first perhaps more from ignorance than malice, was founded, in all probability, on a mistaken interpretation, or a perverted report of the solemn words employed by our Lord, when he instituted the Last Supper. vitation to eat his body and drink his blood, which is received by believers in a purely spiritual accepta-

^{*} Minucius Felix, p. 24.

tion, but which the heathen understood in a literal sense, was, there is no doubt, the origin of the rumour which imputed to the Christians the horrid crime of infanticide. In like manner, the other part of the calumny, which charged them with licentiousness, is to be traced to the warm and lively affection which was so prominent a feature in the conduct of the primitive Christians to one another. To all who professed to be their brethren in Christ, whether they were old and familiar acquaintances, or had met for the first time, and their person, family, and history were previously unknown, they gave outward tokens of unbounded love, -no sooper did they meet such persons, than they imprinted on their cheek the holy kiss, and evinced a pleasure and joy in their society altogether beyond the power of the natural mind to comprehend." "How is this," they used to say, "how can the Christians recognise as brethren those on whom they never before set their eyes?" The heathen looked upon it as an inexplicable mystery,—the bond of feeling by which Christians of every country and of every name were united in the closest fellowship, and they were tempted to imagine that there were some privy marks on their bodies, by which they at once knew and loved each other, and concealed, under the names of brother and sister,* the unhallowed practices to which they were said to be addicted. The Christians repudiated the calumny with unrestrained indignation. They appealed to their whole conduct, to all the inquiries which the tribunals instituted into their character and habits, and to the knowledge of their neighbours and servants, who were intimately acquainted with their most private and every-day life, whether the slightest circumstance was ever known to justify the imputation of such horrid crimes; and it is remarkable, that although they challenged re-

^{*} The Romans employed the expression, "brother and sister," in a most impure sense. See Martial's Epigrams, book ii., epig. 4.

peatedly the closest investigation, and insisted on being tried by a court of justice,—yet their enemies never dared to make an impartial scrutiny into their lives,-nay, although several female slaves were examined by torture, with the view of tempting them to criminate their Christian masters, nothing could be obtained even from the weakness of the sex, beyond some incoherent and unsatisfactory stories, which the judges were well persuaded were wrung from them through intensity of anguish, to cast any stain upon the moral character of the Christians. It was in vain that, in their apologies, and in their daily mingling in society, they protested the impossibility of their perpetrating such enormities, holding the principles that they did,—they who believed that none but the pure could see God, give themselves up to brutal lusts,-they indulge themselves with a sight of the gladiatorial contests,—gratify an unnatural appetite with viands of human flesh,—pollute their bodies and souls with unheard-of impurities, who know that the law of God required, not only purity in the outward conduct, but in the thoughts and devices of the heart! Their apologies were read by few,—their remonstrances were little attended to, their principles were disbelieved; and they who were in that corrupt and degenerate age, the only lights of the world, the only sait of the earth, were represented as on a level with the sensual beasts. * With no less shameful disregard to truth, the heathen aspersed Christianity on account of the weakness and ignorance, the meanness and poverty, of its early disciples. Confounding them, as they universally did at first, with the Jews, they expressed contempt for the Christians, as belonging to a people who had long been proverbial in the world for their foolish and obstinate credulity. And when they found that the whole talk of the Christians related to an executed

^{*} Minucius Felix, p. 22; Neander, p. 85; Watson's Apol., Let. 6.

criminal, who they asserted was still alive, while the other Jews as stoutly maintained that he was dead, and that the former were the causes of many seditious tumults, they felt at a loss whether most to despise and scorn them for the absurdity of their opinions, or the flagitiousness of their conduct. Moreover, they despised the Christians as destitute of all learning and education, without pretensions to reasoning, eloquence, or any of the admired arts of persuasion, as demanding blind faith in their assertions, while, at the same time, the only evidence they adduced of the truth of their statements was, the performance of a few feats of magic, and courting the society, not of the wise, and learned, and discerning, in whose presence they never ventured to introduce their extravagancies, but of silly women, children, and slaves, whose weak judgments were easily misled, and whose imaginations were dazzled by the power of their enchantments. "In public, and before people of the least discrimina tion," says the heathen in Minucius Felix, "they are silent, and have not a word to say for themselves or their novelties; but the moment they get into corners, and are surrounded only by the ignorant vulgar, or a company of boys and credulous women, they talk and boast at the greatest rate." Still farther, the heathen despised the Christians as consisting wholly of the foulest dregs of society, their ranks being filled, not only by tailors, weavers, shoemakers, and illiterate mechanics of every description, but the most abject beggars,-men who had not houses to live in, and scarce decent clothing to cover them, and whose whole talk was an unintelligible jargon, as low in sentiment as rude in language. In short, they looked down upon the Christians with scorn, not only for the foul calumnies that were fastened on their moral character, but for the extreme wretchedness and vulgarity of their worldly condition. "We shall in vain look," they said, "for a solitary individual, whose

circumstances in life, or whose education, could give some appearance of respectability to their low and miserable association." The whole charge was as false as it was heartless,-for, not to mention that the truth of a religion is not to be determined by the character of those who embrace it, and that the faith of the Christians was to be judged by its own evidence-not by the temporal state of the primitive believers—the slightest inquiry would have been sufficient to set the calumny for ever at rest; and although, from the nature of the case, the majority of the early believers were of the lower orders, who dwelt in obscure houses, yet, it was not true, either that they spoke of Christianity only in secret, or that there were no converts belonging to the higher and educated classes. It was notorious, as appears from the works of all the Fathers, that the Christian doctrine and Christian worship were not confined to private houses and remote villages, or brought forward only in the hearing of the illiterate and the obscure; but that it was frequently and publicly proclaimed in the synagogues of the Jews, and at the temples of the heathen, —in the streets and market places of the most populous cities in the world,—before the learned senate of Athens,—and within the walls of the imperial palace of Rome. Moreover, although not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble, were called, yet, even in the first ages, Christians could boast of having among the brethren, many persons of philosophy and learning, of wealth and influence, of equestrian and patrician rank, as is fully attested by a multitude of heathen documents which have come down to our day. Pliny found Christians in his province of every Tertullian remonstrated with the Roman governors on their sanguinary proceedings, as certain to banish or destroy the best citizens in all places and offices of the State,—in the council, the armies, the senate, and courts of judicature. Similar evidence is

afforded by the famous edict which was issued about 250 years after Christ, decreeing that all knights professing Christianity should be degraded, and that women of rank should have their estates confiscated. The sneer, therefore, against the Christians, that they were universally a band of rude mechanics and wretched slaves, was raised without any good or sufficient grounds. It was no wonder, indeed, that multitudes of the early believers were people of ignoble birth and humble condition, -not only because they, who are eminent for rank, distinguished for attainments, and possessed of power, are few, comparatively with the rest of mankind, but because persons, whose ambition was not set upon the honours, and whose hearts were not corrupted by the pleasures of the world, were more likely to embrace the humble and self-denying faith of the Gospel. Nor was it any greater wonder that the first teachers of Christianity, who believed it was a message of salvation for all classes of fallen and sinful men, should adapt their discourses to the weak capacities and the homely language of the artisans and the women,—the young people and the slaves, who waited on their ministry. But this circumstance, so far from reflecting any, even the slightest, discredit on the Christians, tends to their highest honour; and it is the peculiar glory of their religion, that, while the poor and labouring classes were neglected by the philosophers and statesmen of antiquity, and left to live and die without any benevolent attempts to raise them above the grossest ignorance,—to the poor the Gospel was preached. *

Such were some of the principal—for they are not by any means the whole—calumnies which the malicious spirit of the Pagans put in circulation against the followers of Christ. The whole world was ranged in opposition to the Christians,—the populace as well

^{*} Birgham, vol. i., p. 22; Watson's Apol., Letter iv.; Minucius Felix, p. 7; Cave's Prim. Christians, part i. chap. ii.; Fleury, Mœurs des Chretiens, p. 7.

as men in power and authority,-beggars as well as philosophers, -peasants as well as princes, united in a common feeling of deep and inextinguishable hatred to the believers, whom they loaded with every opprobrious epithet, and held up as objects of universal infamy. Sometimes they described them as a band of secret and dangerous conspirators; at other times, as a despicable company of Eastern magicians; or a set of impious wretches, who were pursued by thevengeance of Heaven, and on whose account the world was frequently visited with calamities. Now, they vilified them as a class of gloomy, moping, fanatics, who, disliking the business of life, spent all their time in psalmody and prayer; and then, as the common enemies of mankind, or monsters of iniquity, who had invented and practised new forms of wretchedness. The invention of these calumnies was the masterpiece of Satan, as nothing contributed more formidable obstacles to the propagation of the faith and the increase of its disciples, than the fear of that odium which universally followed the name of Christian, and the deep and bitter prejudices which the circulation of those slanders every where created against the Christian body. What the combined persecution of princes and their deputies, priests and the populace, could never have effected by the sword, was surely and speedily accomplished by the artful tongue of defamation. Thousands after thousands might have been put to the torture, and have endured all the lingering and refined cruelties which inventive malice could suggest; and yet the indomitable spirit of the Christians was not in the least subdued or crushed. more oppressed by the strong arm of power, the more they multiplied,—the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. But the diabolical plan of blasting the reputation of those against whose characters no imputation could be fastened, met with instant and astonishing success; and never did their

enemies resort to weapons more powerful and deadly, than when they threw out calumnies against Christianity and the habits of its professors. Eventually, however, the wise providence of God rendered even these conducive to the extension of the Gospel and the peace of believers, for they were the occasion of calling forth a number of learned defences and historical apologies, which not only established more strongly the evidences of the Christian faith, but disclosed to the admiration of the world virtues and excellencies, which, but for the opposition and calumnies of their enemies, Christian humility would have for ever concealed from the knowledge of mankind.

CHAPTER V.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

EXTREME ANXIETY OF MAGISTRATES AND OF PRIESTS TO ENSNARE CHRISTIANS INTO IDOLATRY—DIFFERENT MOTIVES OF EACH—SNARES LAID TO INDUCE THEM TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE GODS—TO PART WITH THE SCRIPTURES, OR TO READ THEM ONLY AT CERTAIN TIMES, AND ON CERTAIN TERMS—TO GET THEM TO SACRIFICE—SPRINKLING GOODS IN THE MARKET—MEATS PREPARED NOT BY COOKS, BUT PRIESTS—EVANGELICAL LIBERTY IN EATING MEATS OFFERED TO IDOLS—COURAGEOUS REMONSTRANCE TO JULIAN—POLLUTING FOUNTAINS—BOWING TO STATUES OF GODS AND EMPERORS—SWEARING BY THE EMPEROR'S GENIUS—TRAINING CHRISTIANS TO BOX—TEMPTATIONS TO LICENTIOUSNESS.

EVERY age of the Church has had its peculiar temptations, and the besetting sin to which the primitive Christians were exposed, was that of denying their faith, and relapsing into the acknowledgment and worship of the heathen gods. In their times the public and continued profession of Christianity was made amid a combination of difficulties and trials, of which we, in this land and age of religious liberty, can scarcely form an idea; and, after the details we have given in the preceding pages of the cold-blooded cruelties inflicted on the persons, and the horrid calumnies propagated against the name of Christians, no reader can wonder that, under the united terrors of imperial vengeance and popular odium, multitudes of weak and unstable Christians were tempted to desert from the ranks of the faithful, and seek the enjoyment of life and property under the shade of the old super-

stition. The Pagan leaders, however, though at all times bitter and determined in their opposition to Christianity, did not always pursue the same merciless course of policy towards its disciples. ing that death, instead of inspiring terror, was, of all things, most welcome to men who looked to it as the pathway to their much talked of paradise above; and finding that, "as opposition usually gives opinion strength," the numbers of the Church were replenished with new recruits as fast as the old disappeared, the governors and priests resolved on other means of crushing the rival religion. At times they sheathed the sword of persecution,—silenced the tongue of defamation,-recommended every where the adoption of mild and conciliating measures, and professed a disposition to be satisfied with the slightest act of conformity, on the part of the Christians, to the national worship. Many of the magistrates, who could not stifle their feelings of humanity, lamented the prodigal waste of blood, and the loss of so many valuable lives to the service of the commonwealth, and were really anxious for a pretext to put an end to the sanguinary proceedings which had been so long carried on against the followers of Jesus on account of their religion. Looking upon the apostasy of the Christians from the temples and worship of their fathers as a popular delusion, which, if left to itself, would soon die away, they gave out that they would spare the lives of all who were charged with the crime of Christianity, on terms which implied the easiest possible submission to the religion of the empire. For themselves, they did not care about one form of faith more than another, -the truth or the falsehood of polytheism and Christianity they never made a subject of serious inquiry. But knowing the one to be interwoven with the political constitution of Rome, and the other to be an innovation on its most venerable institutions, they deemed it a matter

both of duty and expediency to require all their subjects to honour and obey the laws, while, at the same time, to gain even the ready compliance of the fanatics, they required only such tests as they imagined none could have a shadow of excuse for refusing.

The priests and other advocates of Paganism pursued the same line of policy, though from very different views. Impelled by their zeal for the honour of the national worship, they could not be at rest till they saw wanderers from the temples reclaimed to their ancient habits, and the altars of their favourite divinities lighted up with their wonted splendour; and the more sincere were their prejudices, the more bigoted their attachment to the images and rites which they had received as a sacred inheritance from their fathers, the more ardent was their desire, the more indefatigable their efforts to gain over open or suspected enemies of the gods to give some tokens of homage to idolatry. Bitter as was their animosity against the Christians, and insatiable as was their thirst for the blood of that odious people, they felt more delight at the defection of a single follower of Christ, than if the whole society could have been annihilated at a single blow. Strange as it may appear, they often betrayed an intenser eagerness, and took more pains, to ensnare weak and wavering believers to apostatize, than, at other times, to compass their destruction; and they showed, by their unbounded satisfaction at the success of their efforts, that they looked upon a solitary deserter from the Gospel as of the last importance to their tottering cause. reason is obvious. Persecution might rid them of a class of persons whose presence was an annoyance, and whose habits were a standing censure of theirs. But the apostasy of Christians implied a preference of the Pagan worship to that which they had abandoned. The death of the multitudes who, in times of persecution, sealed their attachment to Christianity with their

blood, would remain a lasting testimony to the present and future ages, that the martyrs in its cause considered it the only true religion, and one of sufficient importance to justify the surrender of their lives rather than deny it. The appearance among idolaters of Christian deserters, was a proclamation to the world that the cause in which they had embarked was false, and gave an appearance of triumph to the national Hence the most secret and subtle arts were put in practice to accomplish so desirable an end. Every method which low cunning or crafty policy could devise, was resorted to in order to ensnare Christians into compliance with heathen superstitions. No matter in what particular this act of conformity was testified -whether by a momentary presence in a heathen temple—by a passing bow to an image—by wearing a sprig of laurel on a public festival, or by throwing a morsel of salted cake to the household gods on crossing the threshold, the wishes of their judges were gratified—their object was attained—and they promised the Christians not only their lives, but toleration for their religion on such easy and trifling conditions.

It may interest the reader to illustrate, by a few examples of the compliances most commonly required at the tribunals, the artful and insidious manner in which the judges tried to waylay and surprise the

Christians into acts of idolatry.

In no respect was the religion of the Christians more opposite to that of the heathens, than in the ideas they respectively inculcated about the proper object of worship. The heathens, believing in a multiplicity of gods, were ever ready to pay homage to the deities of others. Increase the list to as great an extent as might be, their devotion was as unbounded as were the objects that claimed their worship, and go to whatever place, or mingle with whatever people they might, they deemed it their duty to comply with the rites, and to acknowledge the supremacy of

the guardian deity of the land. Among the Romans, who were the masters of the world, every form of religion that was any where known, every deity that was worshipped under the sun-from the cats, crocodiles, and garden-stuffs of Egypt, to the unknown God, whom the Athenian sages honoured with an image, found "a local habitation and a name;" and accustomed, therefore, as the rulers and people were, to offer indiscriminate honours to all, under whatever denomination of divinity they went, they could not but see, with the utmost astonishment, the refusal of the Christians to worship more gods than one. As they could not imagine it was any crime to offer a hecatomb to the gods of other nations, they looked upon it as a species of foolish and obstinate bigotry in that class of people, not to bow the knee to any other god but their own. They were too ignorant—of religion, to appreciate the feelings of the Christians, who, believing the Gospel to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, could not but look upon every other mode of faith as falsehood and error, -and of the character of Him who is a jealous God, to perceive any sin in rendering that worship and glory to any other that was due to him alone. This, therefore, was a point on which their heathen persecutors tried by every artifice to assail and overcome their resolution. They invited them to come and see some ancient curiosities in the temples-if they did not wish to enter the temples, they might only make a verbal confession of their belief in the existence of the heathen gods; or if they still scrupled to do that, the easier alternative was offered them of simply pronouncing the names of Jupiter or Juno, Saturn or Minerva, or any of the occupants of the Pantheon they chose. Or varying this insinuating mode of assault, surely, they said, the Christians cannot but acknowledge that Apollo must be very beneficent, when he confers, from day to day, such an inestimable blessing as

light on the world-and Ceres must have inexhaustible resources, who, from a few paltry seeds, yields so plentiful a return in harvest-and Neptune must have prodigious power, that stills the raging billows of the ocean-and Mars, the great ancestor of the Romans, possess invincible powers, since his fond partiality has awarded universal triumph to the arms of his descendants. In such indirect and artful ways of speaking, the heathens often endeavoured to extort from the Christians' some acknowledgment of their gods, which they would instantly turn to account. But not the slightest concession of the kind could they, with all their subtleey, obtain, and by no admission, either expressed or implied, could the Christians be brought to place the false and imaginary objects of heathen worship on a level with the Maker and Governor of heaven and earth. Among many other anecdotes that might be introduced to prove this, one may suffice. A bishop of the name of Dionysius, being summoned into the presence of the governor of the place, was desired not to abandon the Christian worship, but only to express his belief in the existence of other gods than his own-he was promised life, liberty, and honour, as the reward of his confession. But he stedfastly refused. "What in the name of wonder," exclaimed the magistrate, "can prevent you, supposing the God of the Christians is really one, from worshipping him along with others, whom all men from time immemorial have adored?" Dionysius answered, -" We cannot worship any other god;" and the judge, smiling with contempt at the weakness of a man whom, though having an appearance of respectability, he considered the dupe of an absurd and obstinate delusion, dismissed him hastily from the tribunal.

Another snare, which was very frequently laid for the Christians, was, trying to get them to surrender the whole or parts of the Scriptures. For a long

time the Pagans were not aware of the existence of the Book of God, as they never dreamed that the religion of Christ was taught in a sacred book, but ere long they discovered the immense value that was set upon it, and felt corresponding anxiety to get it out of the way. In the later times of persecution, the possession of a copy of the Scriptures was punished as a capital crime, and the most anxious endeavours were made to rob the Christians of a volume, from which, it was found, they imbibed all the peculiarities of their sect. Greater pains are not taken in the present day for circulating the Scriptures all over the world, than were employed in those times of affliction to the Church for the suppression and destruction of the holy book. Vast multitudes of copies were seized and contemptuously destroyed, and sometimes, by a refinement of cruelty, the owners of the precious treasure were compelled to pile them in a heap, and, with their own hands, set them on fire. But the great majority of Christians refused to part with what they valued more than all the treasures of the East, and concealing them under ground in old chests, and in various secure repositories, bade defiance to the most diligent researches of their enemies. Being thus baffled and disappointed, the heathen resorted to artifice in order to get the sacred book of the Christians into their hands. Perhaps, they hinted, the followers of Christ being, for the most part, poor, might have no other books, but they would be very willing to give them others, as large and more entertaining than the one they parted with; or if, from long habit, the Christians had become attached to that species of reading, and could not bear to give up an old and favourite occupation,-if they could not part with the whole volume of the Scriptures, their assailants hinted that they were willing, as they did not wish to be too hard in their demands, to accept of any particular book, or fragment of a book, that

belonged to the Scriptures, and that they might retain the rest in their own possession, and make any use of it they pleased, provided only that they indulged in reading it privately. Or, if they were averse to part with the Scriptures, they expressed their readiness to take any other book in place of them, if they would surrender it into the hands of the officers publicly, as a sort of pledge in the eyes of the people of their having renounced the forbidden volume. Sometimes they agreed to let the Christians retain their Scriptures if they would only promise never to mention the name of such a book to any of their heathen neighbours, or speak of it so as to excite their curiosity and desire to peruse it, or quote any of the doctrines and promises contained in it. At other times, they offered them the privilege of retaining the Scriptures, if, during the day, they would lock them up, or put them constantly aside till the dark hour of midnight, hoping that the poverty of the Christians would not afford them the expense of light, or the fatigues of labour produce a disinclination to steal much or frequently from the hours of repose. Some governors had no objections to the Christians possessing copies of the Scriptures, provided they never read them in company, never explained them to their children and servants, and, above all, never listened to them in their stated assemblies of worship, or engaged in singing those portions of them which were reduced to a metrical form, and were always found to be the most attractive to the memory and the feelings. Others, again, freely allowed not only the possession but the perusal of the Scriptures, either in private or in the family, only they required that, for the privilege of that literary enjoyment, the owner or reader should make a confession that he did not regard the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Gospels of the Evangelists, or the Epistles of Paul and Peter, in any other light than the Poems of Homer and Virgil, the

Letters of Cicero and Pliny, the Annals of Livy and Tacitus, which were merely human, though excellent and admired compositions. Few, it may well be supposed, to whom these propositions were made, would comply with terms which deprived the Scriptures of all their value, and which, besides doing dishonour to their Divine Author, required them to conceal the truth in unrighteousness. But the character and variety of these alternatives betray the intense desire of the heathen to dispossess the Christians of the Word of eternal life, or, when they could not succeed in that attempt, to grant toleration to read it on such conditions as would blast the character of the be-

lievers, and destroy the efficacy of the truth.

Another object to which all the arts of the heathen magistrates were directed, was that of trying to ensnare the Christians to sacrifice. Knowing that they abhorred all splendour, images, and licentious paintings, they invited them to come to the temples on a particular day, when they promised that there would be little of worldly pomp, and nothing of sensual impurity, to offend the mortified taste of a Christian observer. Or, if that were too much to expect, they required only the simple condition of his repairing once to offer sacrifice; and, if he considered the sacrifice of a lamb, a kid, or a hog, too high a token of respect, they assured him that they would be quite satisfied with his throwing a few grains of incense into the embers or live charcoal that lay upon the altars.* No test was more frequently required than this, as it seems to have been long accounted by the enemies of the Christians the easiest and most accommodating terms that could be imagined; and the severity of the measures consequent on refusal was often extremely great, in proportion to what was deemed an obstinate contempt of the elemency and liberality that were shown them. In the hottest periods of persecu-

^{*} Hailes' Disquisitions, p. 102.

tion, when the life of a Christian was as little thought of as that of a dog, multitudes, who were daily dragged to the tribunals, were, by the humane magistrates, generally offered the alternative of death or throwing the smallest grain of incense into the fires of the altars, -a way of escape which they thought no criminal in his senses would hesitate for a moment to embrace; —and to the pastors, deacons, and other Christians of rank and influence, who had the distinction above their brethren of commonly lying for a considerable time in confinement, the opening of the prison doors was promised, if they would only condescend to give a small contribution of incense to the altars, as an outward token of respect to the gods of their country. To enable the magistrates to make good these promises, it was customary for them, particularly in the reign of Diocletian, to erect their tribunals along the walls, or within the porches of the temples, where altars were accessible, or else small portable altars were placed in the courts of judicature, close to the judge's bench, that every litigant might offer incense as a necessary preliminary to the hearing of his cause.* A firm and persevering refusal to comply with this little formality of the court, as it was called, was looked upon as the evidence of a bad character, and the symptom of a bad cause; while, on the other hand, the person who, on entering with a free and bold hand, lifted a little incense and strewed it on the burning charcoal, met with the marked approbation of the magistrate, and with shouts of applause from the creatures constantly kept around him for the purpose of trumpeting the fame or infamy of those Christians who purchased their lives by an unworthy compliance.

There were multitudes, however, on whom all these arts of temptation produced no effect, and the magistrates perceiving their resolute behaviour, and deter-

^{*} Neander, p 158;

mined, at the same time, by fair means or foul, to get them to sacrifice, had recourse to stratagem. The lives of some, for instance, they spared, because, when insensible from bodily sufferings, or when their arms were powerless from the rack, they were made to go through some act of sacrificing, which satisfied the magistrates,—had incense put into their hands, or the meat of a sacrifice thrust into their mouths, or were forcibly carried up the steps of the altar,* and had the impure incense thrown on their right hands, t or were made to stand at the gate of the temples, and present twigs of laurel or palm-trees to those who came thither to sacrifice. Sometimes they caused all the eatables on sale in the markets to be sprinkled with the holy waters of paganism, and appointed persons to sit at the gateway of the public baths with pitchers of this water beside them, out of which, with a brush, they besmeared the clothes of those who were entering. I At other times, they counselled the great and wealthy among the heathen to have the food used in their families consecrated to idols, and then set before their Christian slaves, or, when they gave entertainments to their friends, to ordain the animals to be slaughtered, not by butchers, or cooks, but by priests only. In the later times of persecution, this refinement of cruelty was much practised, insomuch, that nothing ever appeared at table until each dish had been consecrated and sprinkled with

^{*} A woman who was cajoled by very flattering and gentle words to sacrifice, resisted all the efforts of the court. Being at length forcibly dragged to the place for sacrificing, she struck the altar with her heel, and overturned it and all that was upon it.—Martyrs of Palestine, chap viii. A Syrian peasant, a plain and simple man, but of dauntless courage, had for a long time endured incredible tortures, so far as to have wearied the executioners, whose office it was to torment him. At length he was lifted up and carried to the altar, from which a piece of live charcoal with some incense was taken and attempted to be put into his hand, that he might seem to the bystanders to be sacrificing. But he held his hand so firmly clenched, that every effort to open it was unavailing, and he preferred rather to have his hand burnt to ashes, than comply with the forbidden act.—Fleury, Hist. Eccles., vol. ii. p. 604.

† Martyrs of Palestine, chap. i.; Burton, vol. ii. p. 438.

‡ Martyrs of Palestine, chap. ix.

wine, according to the customary rites of idolatry, and no one could accept an invitation to a feast, without incurring the risk of either partaking of impure meat, or having his person besprinkled with the abominable waters of the temple.* This snare was very commonly, during all the persecutions, laid for the Christian prisoners, who were confined in the dun-They were starved for a day or two together, and when appetite, through long fasting, had become ravenous, meat, carefully sprinkled with incense, was set before them, in the hope that the temptation would prove irresistible. Amongst others who suffered this worse than Tantalus' fate was Lucian, an eminent deacon of the church at Tyre. All food was carefully kept from him for two days, and when he had long felt the most violent pangs of famishing appetite, he was carried into a spacious chamber, where a table was spread for him, groaning under all the delicacies of the season. But they had been previously offered to idols, and no urgency of persuasion, no extremity of personal suffering, not even the certainty of a painful and lingering death, could shake the resolution of this courageous disciple to touch not, to taste not the unclean thing. † The Christians were well aware of the counsel which Paul had long before given on this subject, and of the evangelical liberty they possessed to eat of every creature of God that was good for food, even although it had passed through the whole course of pagan lustrations. But they refused the impure viands, and resented the temptation with determined resolution and firmness, as an insidious attempt to ensnare them, by small and involuntary concessions, into a full and universal compliance with the rites of idolatry; and the motives and views under which they acted in these difficult and delicate circumstances, cannot be better described

^{*} Lactantius, chap. xi., also chap. xxxvii. † Fleury, Hist. Eccles., vol. ii. p. 602.

than in the words of indignant remonstrance, which, on the renewal of such arts long after by Julian, two officers of the imperial guards addressed to that prince:

—"Sire, we have been educated in the true religion, and embraced with all our hearts its excellent laws, and therefore we cannot but now behold, with unfeigned sorrow, the abominations you are scattering about in every place, by polluting both meat and drink with odious sacrifices. We do not complain of it as hindering the exercise of our religion, but we have mourned over this cruel policy, as an unjust and tyrannical oppression of a most loyal class of your subjects, and an indelible reproach to your character and reign."*

It would be a tedious and unnecessary labour to describe at length all the mean and villainous arts which the heathen magistrates and priests put in practice, in order to draw the Christians into a real or apparent compliance with the Pagan superstitions. Frequently they despatched messengers to all the reservoirs in the neighbourhood of large cities, to dve the water with the blood or the wine of sacrifices, in order that, although the fluid, in passing through the aqueducts, might regain something of its natural colour ere it reached the inhabitants, they might enjoy the secret satisfaction of the deception that had been practised. Sometimes they caused the images of the gods to be placed close to, or directly behind, the statues of the emperors, that when the people presented themselves on the anniversaries to do civil obeisance to the one, their posture might be construed also into religious obedience to the other. Or, as dealers in magic and jugglery abounded greatly in primitive times, they would, at great expense, provide a public exhibition, or procure a written account to be drawn up of the wonderful performances of the mountebanks, under pretext of affording the world means of forming an impartial judgment, but, in reality, with the secret view

^{*} Life of Julian, p. 254.

of perplexing and confounding the minds of Christians between the rival claims of those feats and the miracles of Christ and his apostles.* Another very common way of tempting the Christians was, by persuading them to swear by the genius of the emperor. Being constantly accused of treason, and pursuing a conduct derogatory to the honour and interests of the emperor, they were frequently told, on their appearance at the tribunals, "We don't require you to renounce notions you appear to be so fond of, or relinquish habits you may find it difficult to give up. We will grant you oleration, if you will submit to a simple test of your loyalty,—swear by the genius of the emperor." The Christians would pray for the life of the emperor, but his genius was something not belonging to the nature of man, and savouring of idolatry, and, therefore, they could not comply with the condition. In the year 200, some Christians, from a town in Numidia, were brought before the Roman proconsul of the province. "You may receive pardon from our emperor," said the governor, "if you will pay him the respect due from subjects to their king." "It is our principle," said Speratus, who was spokesman for his brethren, "first to fear God, and then to honour the emperor." "We are also pious," rejoined the magistrate, "but we swear by the genius of the emperor, our lord, which you must also do." The honest Christian replied, "I know nothing of this genius of the emperor; I pay regularly all the taxes and imposts that are exacted, for I acknowledge the emperor as my ruler; but I can only worship and swear by God, the King of kings, the Lord of all. † A still more artful snare than any we have yet adverted to, remains now to be

^{*} Neander, p. 66.
† Euseb. Hist., ch. vii. Christians were required also to swear by the fortune of Cæsar. The Roman emperors kept a statue of Fortune in their bedchambers, which was considered as the palladium of the empire. It is difficult to understand the precise meaning of swearing by the fortune of Cæsar; but some sort of veneration was undoubtedly intended .- Christ. Antiq., p. 92.

described; and it was laid only for those confessors of Christ who had been long detained in prison. particular regimen was prescribed to them,—this happened in the time of Galerius and Maximin,—rations were daily dealt out to them from the imperial storehouses, and officers, at intervals, made them pass through a varied and laborious exercise, similar to what is known by the name of training. When, by this means, they had been brought into good condition, the proposal was made to them, that it was in their own power to procure life and liberty, on the easy condition of taking the cæstus, and exhibiting at a public boxing-match for the entertainment of the people in the amphitheatre. The terms were degrading, and many Christians preferred encountering torture and death, in their most appalling form, to the public infamy of practising a discipline so inconsistent with their holy profession. * Temptations of a more formidable nature even than this were more than once thrown in the way of the imprisoned martyrs. They were forced to feed upon the richest meat,—to drink the most generous wines,—to pamper their appetites with the rarest luxuries,—to repose on couches of downy softness, surrounded by every accompaniment that could captivate the senses; and, while in this state of elysium, women of surpassing beauty and most elegant address were introduced, to complete, by their meretricious arts, the scene of temptation.

Many were caught by one or other of these snares. And among the causes of intestine discord that distracted the bosom of the primitive Church, there was not a more prolific source of unhappy strife and division, than what arose out of the various cases of those who, in time of temptation, had fallen away. But the great majority gave no place to the enemy. They resisted unto blood, striving against sin; and their death was invariably the more cruel, that their firm-

^{*} Martyrs of Palestine, ch. vii.

ness baffled the most elaborate arts, and the utmost ingenuity of their persecutors, to shake it. Indignant at the rejection of terms so liberal, and at the supposed ingratitude of the Christians for offers so condescending and humane, they thought that no degree of punishment was too great for such a strange obstinacy; and hence another part of the trials of the primitive believers consisted in modes of torture and of death, rarely, if ever, paralleled in any other age of the world.

CHAPTER VI.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

THE HORSE—MUTILATION—THE MINES—BATHS OF DIOCLETIAN—HARDSHIPS ENDURED IN THE MINES—BRIEF RESPITE—MANY OF THE MOST
EMINENT BISHOPS AND PRIVATE CHRISTIANS MAIMED IN VARIOUS WAYS
—FIGHTING WITH WILD BEASTS—CLOTHED IN SKINS OF DOGS, ASSES,
&C.—FONDNESS OF THE ROMANS FOR THOSE COMBATS—IGNATIUS—
AGAPIUS—THE CROSS—THE APOSTLE ANDREW—MARTYRS IN EGYPT—
CRUCIFYING WITH HEAD DOWNWARDS—THROWING DEAD BODIES INTO
RIVERS—LEAVING THEM A PREY TO BIRDS AND RAVENOUS BEASTS—
MINGLING THE BONES OF CHRISTIANS WITH THOSE OF LOWER ANIMALS
—REDUCING THEM TO ASHES—VARIOUS METHODS OF DOING THIS—
PITCHY COATS—IRON CHAIR—THE WHEEL—VARIOUS OTHER PUNISH—
MENTS—THE RACK—BITHYNIAN GOVERNOR—MARTYRS—CONFESSORS—
SUICIDES—CRIMINALS PRETENDING TO BE CHRISTIANS—ESTIMATE OF
THE NUMBER OF MARTYRS.

From the time that Christianity, by the unexampled rapidity of its progress through the world, struck with astonishment and consternation the rulers of the Roman empire, her statesmen, on grounds of ancient policy, and the numerous friends of the reigning superstition, from the stronger motives of selfishness, adopted the most vigorous measures to stem the tide of conversion; and when they found that their utmost efforts were inadequate, by conciliation or bribery, to discourage the increase of new disciples, their disappointed and exasperated zeal discharged its full measure of vengeance on the heads of the old and most stedfast believers. They proclaimed Christianity to

be treason against the emperor; and forgetting the mild spirit of Roman legislation, which had fixed, by laws of venerable antiquity, a graduated scale of punishments, they broke through the usual forms of judicial procedure, to introduce modes of torture and execution till then unknown in the criminal code of the empire. At first, and during the whole progress of the primitive age, a lenient and conciliatory policy was in many places pursued towards the followers of Christ. A reluctance was shown by several humane emperors and governors to bring matters to extremities, and even when political considerations, or zeal for the interests of idolatry, constrained them to unsheathe the sword of persecution, there were always a few, who, to the honour of humanity, displayed a becoming anxiety to prevent the tribunals from being degraded into scenes of barbarian cruelty, and to render death to those whom, on conviction of the supposed crime of Christianity, they were obliged to condemn, as quick and easy as possible.* But every reader must be convinced, from the perusal of the preceding chapters, not only that such moderation was rare, and that in the breasts even of the most humane and liberal the sources of compassion and mercy were completely dried up in the heat of persecution, when time and habit had made them familiar with bloodshed, but that the great majority of governors and magistrates, filling offices in the pagan temples, or closely connected with the priests, were ready at all times, and especially when they had the countenance and support of bigoted and tyrannical emperors, to employ their power and their influence for the annovance and destruction of the Christians, and practised, without scruple, the utmost severities on a class of people whose firmness of principle was ignorantly mistaken for "a stupid and inflexible obstinacy." As Christianity extended, and the contest between that religion and paganism became fiercer

^{*} Tertullian's Letter to Scapula.

and more deadly, humanity and moderation towards its adherents were totally extinguished among idolaters and politicians of every degree. The ancient modes of punishment and death were deemed too light and honourable for a class of people who were universally odious for their reputed crimes, and looked upon with cold suspicion as the enemies of the human race. Tortures were every where put in practice against them, which had been hitherto reserved only for the meanest slaves and the vilest criminals; and the invention of malice was stretched to the utmost to devise new forms of death and refinements of cruelty, such as should degrade the wretched sufferers beneath the level of humanity,* and at the same time prolong, by their lingering nature, the fiendish satisfaction and triumph of the persecutors. These are circumstantially described by all the ancient fathers of the Church, whose works have been transmitted to our time; and it was reserved to the sceptical historian of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," to be the first to throw vague hints of suspicion on the real extent of the sufferings endured by the primitive Christians. "It would have been an easy task," says that author, "from the history of Eusebius, the declamations of Lactantius, and the most ancient acts, to collect a long series of horrid and disgustful pictures, and to fill many pages with racks and scourges, with iron hooks, and red-hot beds, and with all the variety of tortures which fire and steel, savage beasts, and more savage executioners could inflict on the human body. melancholy scenes might be enlivened by a crowd of visions and miracles, destined either to delay the death, to celebrate the triumph, or to discover the relics of those canonized saints who suffered for the name of Christ. But I cannot determine what I ought to

^{* &}quot;No care," said an ancient governor of Palestine, "ought to be taken of these Christians; let all treat them as unworthy the name of men."—
Euseb. Hist. Eccles., b. viii. chap. 10.

transcribe, till I am satisfied how much I ought to believe." * In answer to the sneers of this eloquent, but deeply prejudiced historian, it is sufficient to state, that the works of Eusebius, the great father of ecclesiastical history, were given to the world in the very age which had witnessed the barbarities he described, and when, we may be sure, there were multitudes who would have been ready, for the honour of the old superstition, to embrace the opportunity of recording their evidence, if they possessed any, for disproving the testimony of the Christian historian. But neither Julian, nor any of his literary friends and successors, though well acquainted with the history of Eusebius and the acts of the martyrs, have written a single word to impugn the truth or accuracy of that work; and although it would have been as easy for his Pagan contemporaries to have exposed these errors and exaggerations, if the eagle eyes of their criticism had discovered any, as it would be for the Papists to refute the falsehoods of Protestant historians concerning the persecutions of the bloody Mary in England, yet these venerable remains of ecclesiastical antiquity have ever been ranked among the most authentic pieces of history that the world has ever known, and a whisper was never breathed against their truth and accuracy, till a sceptical historian of the eighteenth century had the hardihood to hint a vague suspicion, unsupported by the smallest evidence. The various cruelties then inflicted on the primitive Christians,—coming to us, as they do, confirmed by the united testimonies of all the ancient fathers from Eusebius downwards, must be received as no less true and credible transactions than any others which the pages of history record; and they form a picture of infernal malicious cruelty, which will remain to the eternal infamy of those who authorised them. †

Imprisonment was one of the most common and

^{*} Euseb. Hist. Eccles., b. viii. chap. 16.

[†] Milner's Answer, p. 86.

gentle of those trials. It was not, however, the mere deprivation of liberty, or the being thrust into a dark dungeon, the horrors of which many mysterious rumours were industriously propagated to augmentfor during incarceration, the unhappy prisoners were doomed to undergo the greatest cruelty of treatment. Their bare backs were lacerated by means of a formidable scourge, consisting of a long leathern thong, terminated by a ball of lead; and while the blood streamed down in deep furrows, the executioner unmercifully repeated his blows, until the medical attendant, who sat by in silence, and every minute or two examined the prisoner, pronounced it impossible for him to bear any more. The poor sufferer, more dead than alive, was then thrust into some foul and loathsome dungeon, where the cold, or the unwholesome atmosphere, slowly but certainly brought him to an end. Sometimes Christians were spared the usual preliminary of the scourge, to be subjected to a worse kind of violence in prison. They were put into the stocks-a punishment common among the Romans. These were formed of two broad pieces of wood, as large as the ordinary size of a man, and placed, the one at the back, the other on the face and belly of the prisoner, with five holes in them, through two of which the feet, through the other two the hands, and through the fifth the head of the prisoner was thrust, and kept in this unnatural position for a day and a night together. His frame was most violently racked by it; and though perspiring at every pore, and weak through excessive fatigue, he was denied every thing in the form of liquor to allay his intolerable thirst, and of food to support exhausted nature. They were made lighter or heavier, according to the nature of the crime, or the disposition of the jailer, being generally from forty to fifty, though sometimes far more than a hundred pounds weight. It was altogether a most insupportable torture; for not only were the arms and legs loaded with the weight of the boards, but distended in a very painful manner, so that the recovery of the free use of the limbs, when it was ever made, was the slow work of time. Many died through the effects of this severe distortion of their bodies. Among others who suffered this punishment was Origen, who continued, with a brief respite, for

several days in that painful situation.*

Similar in kind, though not in form to the stocks, was the punishment of the horse, a huge engine, on which the person condemned to it was placed astride as a horseman, on his back—his hands and feet being laid down. The boards of which the instrument of torture was composed were then suddenly let down and separated, so that every part of the rider's body was distended with the utmost violence-while an executioner standing by, continued to lacerate his body with the ungulæ, a sort of iron pincers, with sharp teeth, like a hook. There were several varieties of this instrument of torture. Some Christians were suspended from it with small cords bound round their arms and legs, which were tightened so much, by the weight of the body and other heavy weights attached to it, as to penetrate deeply into the flesh. were elevated on a scaffolding attached to the equuleus, and then made to undergo the rack, that the proceedings might be better seen and enjoyed by the crowd.

Mutilation was another very common punishment of the primitive Christians. The confessors of the faith, who were often spared to suffer tortures worse than an hundred deaths, had sometimes their ears and nostrils slit in so ghastly a manner, as made them spectacles of horror and disgust even to themselves. Some had their right eyes violently scooped out of the socket, or pierced with the point of a sword, or seared with a red-hot iron, or sealed up with some preparation of wax. Others had their hands com-

^{*} Euseb. Hist. Eccles., b. vi. ch. 39; also b. viii, ch. 10.

pletely lopped off, or lost the use of both by the weight and racking pressure of their manacles. Others had the tendons and sinews of their legs burnt through, or their ankles so completely dislocated, that they were ever after disabled from walking. The consequence of the mutilation being not only to inflict pain and misery on the wretched victims of it for life, but to reduce them, by this mark of disgrace, to such a pitch of degradation, that they were thenceforth incapable of enjoying the common rights of citizens, it became henceforth a favourite punishment of the Christians. Their heads were half shaved, and their foreheads branded like those of common slaves.* In this dismembered and degraded state they were, not so much for any service they could render, as for an aggravation of their misery, employed in some of the immense public works, which the ambition or enterprise of the emperors was then carrying on. Some performed the part of labourers, or rather beasts of burden, in carrying the materials of those enormous baths of Diocletian, the ruins of which are still seen at Rome. Some were appointed to the porphyry quarries of Upper Egypt; but the chief place of banishment for the Christian slaves was the copper mines of Numidia and Palestine, especially those of Phono, situated between Petra and Zoar, in the desert of Idumea.† In those subterranean dungeons, where, from the severity of the labour, and the noxious effluvia that proceeded from the metals, the confinement was most painful, bishops t and deacons, laymen of the first character and rank in society, even women and children, were condemned to labour. From morning to night they had to strain every nerve, and toil in hopeless servi-

^{*} Eminent bishops thus mutilated in time of persecution were present at the public dinner of Constantine after the Council of Nice.—Cave's Lives, vol. ii. p. 68.

Lives, vol. ii. p. 68.

† Burton, vol. ii. pp. 52, 89, 161, 363; Neand., pp. 139, 161.

‡ Cyprian, and some office-bearers of his church, were in this condition. The apostle John dug in the mines of Patmos. See also Martyrs of Pal., ch. xiii. The mines of Numidia contained nine bishops.—Cyp. Epist., 76.

tude, however wearied or incapable, from inexperience of manual occupation, or want of strength, of bearing the incessant demands upon them. Their inexorable taskmasters, like those of the Israelites of old, instead of alleviating the burdens of the aged and the weak, stood over them as they lifted the pick-axe, or drew after them the hurdle, and replied to every complaint, however reasonable, and to every sigh, however involuntary, by beating them with clubs, and increasing the daily exertion. There was not a single comfort to alleviate the hard lot of the Christian prisoners. scanty allowance of food was scarcely sufficient to allay the pangs of hunger, far less to invigorate them for the toils they had incessantly to endure. tattered rags but ill defended them against the cold damp of their subterranean dwellings. Their weary limbs found no place of repose but the bare earth, amid accumulations of filth and rubbish, and by day and by night the iron entered their soul, through the incessant pain occasioned by the galling fetters that cramped their limbs.* For one brief interval, during the reign of Maximin, the Christian prisoners in the mines had a happy respite, being allowed, through the humanity of an overseer, not only to dwell in houses above ground, but to possess the still higher enjoyment of meeting together for worship, - comforts which, bestowed so unexpectedly, after so long a privation, made even the chains of slavery sweet as the bonds of love, and the house of bondage dear as the house of God. But, alas! this was too great happiness to last: intelligence of the happy change in the condition of the Christian slaves at Phoeno reaching the ears of the emperor, the brethren were forbid to hold their meetings for worship—they were separated to more distant mines, or to different parts of the same quarry, where they were not allowed to speak to each

^{*} Hailes' Martyrs of Pal.; Notis, p. 50; Lac., 89; Bingham, vol. ii. p. 128; Euseb., b. viii. chap. 14.

other, and were more severely crushed than ever by a grinding servitude. During the whole of the three first centuries, many of the most eminent Christians, whether for ministerial influence and abilities, or for private worth, appeared in a disfigured and mutilated condition, having been imprisoned at some period of their lives in the mines, on entering which they had been deprived of an eye, a hand, or a foot.* And few things contributed more to the great honour and esteem in which living confessors of the faith were held, than such visible and permanent marks of their

having been sufferers for the name of Christ.

Of all modes of punishment, the most popular with the ancient Roman people was that of setting men to fight with wild beasts; and as it was the kind of death reserved for the most heinous offences, and inflicted on the vilest and most noted criminals, the Christians, who were regarded as the worst and guiltiest of men, were very frequently disposed of in that barbarous manner. This horrid spectacle, which, of all the shows in the amphitheatre, was the most acceptable to the taste of the degenerate Romans in the first three centuries, always formed, on festive occasions, the concluding sport of the day; and those who were made to engage in it, were those felons only to whom no hope of life was left. The Bestiarii, who in the earlier part of the day entered the lists with wild beasts, were allowed all sorts of defensive and offensive armour, and in the event of their slaying their savage antagonist, were rewarded by the applauding spectators with liberty and life. But those who were brought last on the sands of the amphitheatre were naked and defenceless, with the certain prospect before them of an inevitable and horrid They were frequently tied to a wooden pillar, or clothed in the skins of dogs; goats, asses, and such like animals, in order to whet the monster's appetite.

^{*} Lives of the Fathers, vol. ii. p. 68.

or else persons were employed goading his sides with red-hot iron rods, to provoke him to greater fury, and thus afford better sport to the blood-thirsty spectators. The exhibition of such revolting shows was a common way by which governors and magistrates sought to gain popularity; and although the prisons might not contain criminals of atrocity great enough to justify their execution in this barbarous manner, they were never at a loss, when they had the unfortunate Christians to pitch against the wild tenants of the kennels of the Circus. The rabble in a Roman or Grecian city could receive no more grateful intelligence, than that of a supply of victims for the wild beasts; and the exhibiters of the bloody games required only to raise the cry,—"The Christians! away with the Christians! let the Christians be thrown to the lions!"—to hear their shout rapturously responded to by the populace, and to see their object easily, and without expense or trouble, attained. This most frequently happened at those public and festive occasions, which, being graced with the presence of the emperor, it was endeavoured to signalize with the utmost pomp and magnificence, and to give a greater zest to the entertainment by introducing a variety of strange and spirit-stirring sights. Among these, the most extraordinary and universally called for, was an exhibition of Christians set to contend with wild bulls, bears, leopards, tigers, and lions. On an announcement of such an entertainment, the expectations of the people were raised to the highest pitch; and never were the benches of the amphitheatre filled with a denser crowd of men, women, and children, -never did the walls of the Circus resound with more deafening shouts, than when a hungry lion, or a ravenous tiger, starved for the occasion, leaped from his den, and with a tremendous roar, heard even amid acclamations loud as from numbers without number, made an impetuous dash against the poor believer, laying bare his flesh in

ghastly wounds, and crushing his bones as easily as if they were straw.* The famous Ignatius died in this manner at Rome, 20th December 108, during the celebration of the feast Saturnalia. Brought into the arena of the amphitheatre, the holy man—universally odious to the populace as the great leader of the Christians—was assailed with the most savage yells, during which the lions being let loose upon him, quickly despatched the work of destruction, and left nothing of the venerable saint but a few of the harder and larger bones. Agapius, one of the martyrs of Palestine, was another conspicuous victim of this barbarous custom. Several times he had been conducted to the place of execution, in company with the most despicable malefactors; but as often the judge, from irresolution or sympathy, deferred his part in the combat. On a grand occasion, when the bloodthirsty Maximin was present, he was dragged from his cell, along with a base murderer, as the chief among the Christian prisoners. The assassin, guilty as he was, became, like Barabbas of old, an object of the popular clemency and favour, and was dismissed amid thunders of applause, while the confessor of Christ, reckoned more odious and guilty than the criminal, was detained, without the smallest hope of deliverance from the hands of man. Having, to every call to abjure his religion, firmly replied in the negative, and to every inquiry as to his faith in Christ, confessed that "he was God over all, blessed for ever," he was hooted and condemned as an irreclaimable Christian. The signal was given, and in an instant Agapius was in the jaws of a famishing bear.†

^{*} Martyrs of Palestine, chap. iii. p. 11; Lactantius, p. 51; Lardner, viii. p. 134; Burton, pp. 446, 457; Milner, vol. ii. p. 8; Cave's Lives; Ignatius,—Polycarp was doomed to this death, but owing to the unwillingness of Philip, the Asiarch, at whose expense the games were furnished, to protract the combats of wild beasts, the usual period having expired, the lions were not let out, and, to the great disappointment of many, Polycarp was not devoured by wild beasts.—Christian Antiq., vol. ii., Appendix. † Martyrs of Palestine, chap. vi.—During Eusebius' stay at Tyre, he saw a great many Christians fighting with wild beasts; and he states posi-

The cross, another punishment reserved for slaves and the basest of people, was one with which the Christians were, from dire experience, more familiar than almost any other. A minute description of the nature and physical effects of crucifixion, harrowing as it must be to the feelings of the reader, is indispensable to the right understanding of the trials of the primitive Christians. The cross consisted of two large beams, placed across each other, sometimes in the form of a St Andrew's cross, but more commonly in that of the Roman letter T. These, which were carried separately to the place of execution, were there laid down and screwed together on the ground; and the unhappy individual being stripped of all his dress, except a covering about his loins, was stretched along at full length, and his hands and feet, being fully distended, were bound tightly with small cords, or frequently, without any binding at all, were fastened with large iron nails. As the hands alone could not support the weight of the whole body thus suspended, a plug was made to project in the middle of the perpendicular beam, on which the sufferer might rest, and in some slight measure relieve his agonizing posture. But this was a triffing relief; for as the cross, when ready and prepared for erection, was raised by the help of four men, and let perpendicularly fall into the earthen bed, the violence of the descent gave a shock to the wretched individual, which convulsed and agitated his whole frame,—the wounds were thus dreadfully enlarged; and when it is considered, that the body was not only bound so firmly, that the swollen veins must, even in the absence of all other causes of

tively, that to the amazement of all the spectators, those savage animals often refused to touch them, notwithstanding every means was employed to stimulate their rage. $-Euseb.\ H.\ E.$, b. viii. chap. 13. "Perhaps," says Lord Hailes, "the wild beasts were already satiated, or were disturbed by the shouts and uproar of the multitude. There is no necessity for supposing that any thing preternatural happened on this and similar occasions." —Christian Antiq., vol. i. p. 194. To this observation of Lord Hailes, it may be added, that it is well known that the steady gaze of a human eye strikes terror into the fiercest beasts of the forest.

suffering, have occasioned most acute anguish, but violently stretched out in a most unnatural position, -not the slightest movement to relieve which it was possible to make; and when it is considered that the nails were driven generally through parts of the hands and feet, where the nerves and tendons are most numerous and irritable; when, moreover, it is considered, that the deep wounds were increased tenfold in painfulness by the continued pressure of the body, and inflamed by the piercing influence of the midnight air; that the loss of blood produced an extreme thirst, -itself a source of intolerable misery; and that the slow oozing out of the vital fluid, before the eyes and over the person of the sufferer, threw a heavy sickness into his heart, scarcely less poignant than his physical agonies,—we shall be prepared to say in the words of Cicero, that crucifixion is the most horrible of all species of tortures which were ever devised.* Multitudes of Christians were condemned to die in this way. Amid all the agonies of a lingering death, they were generally left till they sank through exhaustion of nature, in which horrible condition they often continued a considerable length of time. The apostle Andrew is said to have lived three days before he expired, and ecclesiastical historians mention the case of several martyrs in Egypt and Palestine, of whom some lived till the seventh day, and others were alive on the cross, even after the wolves and birds had begun to prey upon them: In addition to the pain of it, this punishment was considered of all others the most ignominious, and no Roman citizen † was subjected to it except in very rare instances, where great flagitiousness demanded a more than usual measure of severity and degradation. Persons were sometimes crucified with their heads downward, as the apostle Peter is said to have specially requested, and also

^{*} Lipsius de Cruce, b. iii. chap. 11.
† Hence Paul, a free citizen of Rome, was beheaded in the same persecution in which Peter, a foreigner, was crucified.

several other Christian martyrs after him, deeming it too great an honour to be placed in an erect posture like their blessed Master.* This inverted posture, where the original purpose of assuming it had been forgotten, was frequently ordered to the devoted Christians, their persecutors being anxious in every possible way to add to the ignominy and shame of their sufferings, and it was no small aggravation of the punishment, that, during the lingering process, and after death had released the sufferer from all sense of physical anguish, guards were stationed at the foot of the cross to prevent the relatives or Christian brethren from carrying the body away, and to leave it to become the prey of birds or ravenous beasts, -a precaution adopted in mockery of the Christian hope of a resurrection. It was to defeat this expectation that the believers were so frequently refused the honours of interment; and neither the solicitation of influential intercessors, nor the tears of sorrowing friends, nor the all-powerful consideration of money could, on some occasions, wring a permission from a heathen magistrate to give decent burial to a Christian corpse. Thus, the mangled remains of the martyrs of Lyons were reduced to powder and thrown into the waters of the neighbouring Rhine, that not one particle of them might remain in union with another. And thus, too, during a similar persecution in Palestine, Firmilianus, the inhuman governor, ordered the bodies of the martyrs to be thrown outside the walls of Cæsarea, and appointed guards to watch them and prevent their interment. Multitudes of birds and beasts soon discovered the carcases, stripped them of the small remnants of flesh, and strewed the ground with a heap of white bones. Nay, the heathers went even to the extraordinary length of mixing and confounding the bones of Christians with those of horses, camels, and asses, before throwing them away,

^{*} Euseb., b. iii. chap. 1.

that it might become impossible, as they ignorantly imagined, to distinguish and recover the mortal remains of believers at the resurrection.* Thus far did "they err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." Thus vainly did they attempt to shake the confidence of Christian hope, and think that they could occasion bitter despair to the believers, by putting it out of their power to enjoy the much-valued privilege of burial. However desirable Christians might have considered the decent interment of the body, they knew that the enjoyment or the want of funeral rites would noway affect the sure and certain hope of its resurrection through Jesus Christ. They knew that the promise of God standeth sure; and although their bodies might have been devoured by birds, beasts of the field, or fishes of the sea,-although its dismembered fragments should be scattered to the winds of heaven, and wafted on the breeze to the remotest regions of the world, they believed that God could, by his mighty power, collect every particle of dust, whether imbedded in the bowels of the earth or in the depths of the ocean, or incorporated with the bodies of ravenous animals, and raise the human frame in more than its former beauty, to the joy and the glory of eternal life. †

Another way in which the heathens frequently attempted to baffle the Christians' hope of a resurrection, was by reducing their bodies to ashes. Various were the methods which inventive malice and cruelty devised for accomplishing this. Sometimes the Christians were tied to a stake fixed in the ground, near which a slow fire was burning, and lifted above the fire just so far that a moderate flame flickered about

* Cave's Lives, v. ii. p. 6; Burton, v. ii. p. 175-454; Neand., p. 113;

Mart. of Pal., chap. xi.

† "You may burn this body," says Tatius, "and by preventing lits burial, which we are anxious for, try to dissipate its component parts beyond the power of Providence to recall. But you cannot send them beyond the sphere of the world—and the world is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."—Against the Greeks, chap. ix.

the soles of their feet, until the muscles, contracted by burning, were torn from the bones; then torches, lighted and put out again, were directed to all the members of their bodies, so that no part had any exemption. Meanwhile, cold water was continually poured on their faces, and their mouths moistened, lest, by reason of their jaws being parched, they should expire.* At other times, they were burnt with a refinement of cruelty, which could have originated only in the most savage hatred. They were wrapped in a coat or shirt, which was made of coarse paper, or stout sackeloth, daubed over with pitch, sulphur, wax, or such combustible materials, and in this most annoving dress they were fastened to a stake stuck in the ground -a cord being tied round their chin to keep their head in an erect posture. The inventor of this horrid torture was Nero, in whose gardens it was first exhibited after the conflagration of Rome, and introduced by him in order that the Christian victims might, in the darkness, have the appearance of so many gigantic torches. The pitched jacket seems to have been put upon Polycarp, and it was afterwards frequently used as an approved mode of tormenting the Christians.† Sometimes, when "the troublesome coats" could not be procured, or were not ready in sufficient numbers, the

* Hailes' Lactantius, p. 52'; ii. Lactantius, p. 133; Christ. Antiq., vol. ii. p. 122; Lardner's Heathen Testimonies, chap. vi. † Martial refers to the Christians in the following epigram:—

In matutina nuper spectatus arena Mucius, imposuit qui sua membra focis, Si patiens fortisque tibi durusque videtur Abderitanæ pectora plebis habes. Namcum dicatur, tunicâ præsente molesta, "Ure manum," plus est dicere, Non facio.

B. x. epig. 25.

Not long ago, the actors, by command,
Played the fine tale of "him who burned his hand,"
And at that deed of patriot fortitude
All Romans, young and old, admiring stood.
Misplaced applause! more admiration's due,
For nerve and patience, to the Christian crew,
Who, rather than some grains of incense bear,
The lingering horrors of the pitchy jacket dare.—Anon.

Juvenal also makes allusion to this instrument of Christian torture :-Pone Tigellinum, tæda lucebis in illå

soldiers and menial attendants, who had charge of the executions, were ordered to wrap the bodies of the prisoners in pieces of cloth, previously saturated with some inflammable liquid. Thus Apphianus, after sufferings almost beyond the power of human endurance, was condemned, by order of Urbanus, the governor, to be burnt; and a dress was prepared for him of linen, steeped in oil, in which combustible attire he was bound to the pile.* At other times, the punishment of burning was executed on the Christians by placing them in a sitting posture, on an iron chair just taken red hot from a furnace, and so contrived as that its arms encircled the body of the occupier, or it was gradually heated by a slow fire beneath it.

The wheel was not the least common nor the least dreadful of the punishments to which the primitive Christians were doomed. This instrument of torture rested on an immense wooden board, between which and the wheel a space was left large enough to let an ordinary sized person barely pass through,—the wheel itself, or the board below, being studded with sharp teeth. Bound at full length along the circumference of the wheel, with every part of the body painfully distended, the prisoner was made rapidly to go round; every revolution, as it brought him in contact with the prickly pedestal, producing deep and ghastly furrows on his back and cheeks. Immense multitudes were

> Quâ Stantes ardent qui fixo gutture fumant Et latum media sulcum deducit arena.

SAT. i., 355-7.

Now dare

To glance as Tigellinus, and you glare In that pitched shirt, in which such crowds expire Chained to the bloody stake, and wrapped in fire.
GIFFORD'S TRANSLATION.

Death is your doom, impaled upon a stake; Smeared o'er with wax, and set on fire, to light The streets, and make a dreadful blaze by night.

DRYDEN'S TRANSLATION.

Lord Hailes must have forgot those well-known passages of Martial or Juvenal, when he said, "It does not appear that this wanton cruelty was ever repeated after Nero."—Christ. Antiq., vol. i. p. 107.

^{*} Martyrs of Palestine, chap, iv.

put to death in this manner, among whom were Felix and Fortunatus.*

Many other tortures, too horrible for a circumstantial relation, were invented and renewed by the enemies of the Christians. Some were tied by the feet to great boughs of trees, violently bent and forced together by engines; and on a signal, the boughs being let go, tore asunder the bodies of the martyrs in pieces. Some were enclosed in the belly of a brazen bull, the sides of which were pierced with innumerable small holes to allow thent to breathe, while underneath it, an immense fire acting upon the metal, made the cavity of the monster so intolerably hot, as occasioned indescribable agony to the imprisoned tenant. Others were bedaubed all over with honey, and at noon, when the weather was sultry, fastened to a long pole, where they were soon covered with swarms of flies and wasps, that stung them to death. This was the fate of Marcus of Arethusa, who suffered martyrdom in the reign of Julian. His whole body being besmeared with honey, and various preparations of sugar, he was put into a basket, placed on an eminence on a spacious meadow under the rays of a summer sun, and in a short time his body was so swollen and disfigured with the stings of myriads of insects, that after lingering in great agony, he died. Others were embarked on shipboard under pretext of sailing to a remote place of banishment; but when conveyed to the open sea, the crew set fire to the ship, saved themselves in a life-boat, and left the Christians to perish amid the flames. On one occasion, about eighty persons, of whom the great majority were pastors or deacons, were put to death in this horrible manner, which was resorted to in order to prevent any tumultuous pro-

^{*} Eusebius, in his notice of this engine, uses a word signifying literally "carding wool,"—a word emphatically descriptive of its terrible effects. Elsewhere he describes it "as harrowing the sufferer even to the bones, and deep into the intestines, as if he were composed not of human flesh, but of stone, wood, or some other inanimate substance."—Martyrs of Palestine, chap. xi.

ceedings, by which the martyrdom of such eminent and pious characters might have been followed among the people at home.* In short, they were enclosed in nets and thrown before bulls, to be tossed by the furious heasts—they were raked with shells of fishes, driven into long stakes—broiled on gridirons—had sharp reeds thrust up their fingers from the nails melted lead poured down their backs, and often down their throats-covered with burning plates of metal -bruised under mills-thrown headlong from high buildings—plunged under the waves with a millstone about their necks-sewed up in a bull's hide, with a dog and an asp, and thrown into the sea +-sawn from the extremities, piecemeal, by a slow process buried up to the shoulders in the earth, and left in that helpless position to perish of hunger, ‡ and in a thousand other ways, which it would be revolting to the humane reader to describe, the believers suffered death in most appalling forms, by the malice and cruelty of the enemies of Christ. It was not death alone they had to encounter, but such lingering, shameful, and excruciating torments, as were far more terrible to humanity than death itself. Christians, on falling into the hands of their enemies. could seldom or never anticipate the kind or degree of punishment with which the confession of their faith would be visited. It was one of the greatest trials incident to their situation, that an open and resolute avowal of their attachment to Christianity, not only placed them at all times in almost certain jeopardy of their lives, but left ever a dire imagination to conjure up unknown terrors as to the way in which death

^{*} Cave's Primitive Christianity, part ii. chap. 7.
† This was the common punishment of parricide among the Romans. But the enemies of the Christians, careless about making any discrimination in the punishments inflicted on them, awarded all such as were of the most horrible nature, and implied the last degradation.
‡ Besides the punishments enumerated above, there were the most indecent and infamous barbarities inflicted upon Christian women.—Chandler's History of Persecution; Fleury, Hist. Eccles., vol. ii. p. 427; Hailes' Christ. Antiq., vol. iii. chap. 4; Lardner, vol. viii. p. 303.

would be inflicted. They could read in the bloody experience of multitudes of their brethren, that the implacable malice of their persecutors presented not only no hope of immunity from suffering, but a sure prospect of increased severities against all successive travellers in the same path of religion. But up to their coming under the power of the executioners, they continued in the dark as to the amount and duration of corporal sufferance with which each would be made to atone for his individual offence; and although in time a uniform class of punishments—the most severe and ignominious in the criminal code of Rome -came to be awarded against those convicted of the crime of Christianity, yet the personal prejudices of the judge, the humour of the times, or the excited state of the mob, often gave an intensity and variety to these tortures, far beyond what the severest administration of Roman justice had ever inflicted till then on the vilest criminals. The grand object of the persecutors being not the death of the Christians, but their return to idolatry, or the total suppression of the new religion, their rage was intense in proportion to the bitter disappointment they felt at finding all their efforts ineffectual to reclaim the apostates from idolatry, and support the declining glory of the temples. And as anger in the paroxysms of its fury is always blind and indiscriminating in the course it takes, and when it has its object in its power, delights to riot in the luxury of revenge, so the heathen persecutors presiding in the examination of the Christians at their tribunals, not with the calm and dispassionate temper of judges, but the exasperation of contemptuous and implacable enemies, thought of no precedent, observed no rule, studied no proportion in the punishments they awarded to the convicted followers of Christ. When the Christian prisoners were formidable for their numbers—when any of them displayed an undaunted, bold, and inflexible resolution

-when they remained proof against all the subtle and ensnaring arts, by which the judges and priests attempted to gain from them the smallest acts of homage to the reigning superstition-when they spurned, with undisguised contempt, every god and goddess of whatever name and pretensions in the well-stocked calendar of the Roman Pantheon-when they fled with horror at the sight of an altar, or recoiled from the impure touch of its incense—the resentment of the zealous abettors of Paganism knew no bounds, and resorted to all the means which Satanic malice could dictate for destroying the obnoxious heretics. But the death of the enemy of the gods was not enough; his being rendered for ever incapable, by the loss of life, to repeat the injury, was the last thing thought of. As the interests of idolatry, and the honour of the national worship were concerned, nothing less could suffice but that the instrument of offence be instantaneously offered as an expiation to avert the wrath of its dishonoured patrons. The tongue that had uttered the word of reproach against Jupiter or any of his comrades was forthwith cut out; - the eye that seemed to look with contempt on the embodied representations of divinity was pierced with the point of a sword, or extinguished with a hot iron; -the hand that refused to lift a grain of incense was amputated and thrown into the fire of the temple, as a more acceptable gift than the customary offering; -the foot that trod lightly on an altar was ground to powder, or was for ever disabled from doing its office, and every member of his body, as being partaker in the guilt, was subjected to the utmost extremity of suffering, as an atonement at the shrine of the insulted deities. Never was imagination put more laboriously to the stretch than to invent new punishments for the primitive Christians. Seldom in the history, even of religious wars, have tortures more varied, or atrocity more exquisite, been put in execution, than by the heathen

against the early believers in Jesus. Not the smallest part of the human frame, in which there was a nerve capable of suffering, but was occasionally selected for the practice of some refined cruelty. Scarce an object in nature, or an instrument of art, but was enlisted in the revolting service of maining, tormenting, and killing the servants of the true and living God.

The punishments we have described in the foregoing pages, some of which, however, were more prevalent in one province, others in another, were all practised on the followers of Christ during the greater part of the first three centuries. But it was chiefly during the latter persecutions that they were brought into awfully frequent use, and inflicted with a reckless and inhuman ferocity, altogether unparalleled in the annals of history. The enemies of Christianity, goaded to madness by the amazing progress it was making in every quarter, seemed like incarnate demons let loose to torment the world for a season. The polished cities of Greece and Rome were in those days as much the habitations of horrid cruelty, as the most barbarous regions of Africa at the present time—and the infernal contrivances which were every where introduced, for the slow murder of the Christians, will remain an eternal monument of the intolerant and sanguinary spirit of every false religion. Those extreme punishments, however, were often not resorted to, until the rack had failed to secure the apostasy or shake the resolution of the Christian prisoners. To obtain a consummation so ardently wished for, as their return to idolatry, the heathen magistrates, especially from the reign of Diocletian, were accustomed, before dooming any to the cross or the stake, to order a series of preliminary severities, more or less excruciating and protracted, according to the weak and wavering appearance, or the bold and inflexible demeanour of the parties, under examination for their connection with Christianity. Not only was the torture employed

indiscriminately on Christians of every name and rank -on senators, philosophers, as well as the meanest in the church—although, in ordinary circumstances, it was applied only to slaves; -but an infinite variety of tortures was practised, in order that the strange appearance and unknown effects of these instruments of punishments might appal the convert, and make his resolution falter through the infirmity of nature. In some cases not a limb was broken, not an eye extinguished, nor a drop of blood shed; but every part of the body was subjected to the most violent distention, screwed into the narrowest compass, exposed to intolerable vicissitudes of heat and cold, and annoyed in every possible way in which the human frame was capable of suffering. In others, the apparatus of torture, adapted for the hands, the feet, the legs, and the shoulders, was applied in succession to all those different members, and did its horrid work so effectually, as to disable the sufferer for life, or make nature sink through extremity of pain, in the hands of the tormentors, before the judge had proceeded to doom him to any of the usual modes of public execution. Men of rank, philosophy, and refinement, became as ambitious of the glory of devising refinements in cruelty for the odious race of Christians, as others in happier times are of the merit of making useful inventions. Rewards were offered for new engines of execution, calculated, not like the maiden or the guillotine, in modern times, to expedite the work of death, but to produce the most painful sensations consistently with the continuance of life; and so eager was the competition for the profits and honours awarded to the successful competitors, that every species of suffering which imagination could devise, and mechanical ingenuity produce, was brought into use. magistrates who loaded with money and favour the contrivers of new engines of torture, were of all others the most determined opponents of Christianity. Their

object being not to kill, but to torment-not to rid the world of a set of deluded enthusiasts, so much as to win them back as trophies to the honour of Paganism-not to weaken the empire by the loss of so many subjects, so much as to render them what they thought tractable and obedient to its laws and customs, they employed the most anxious means to proportion the punishments of the Christians to their strength-to recover them when they fainted, and to prevent them attaining the martyrdom they longed for. On persons of obscure condition, or who appeared for the first time before a tribunal, on a charge of having become Christians, the ordinary form of the rack was employed. But pastors and deacons of churches, and Christians who displayed an invincible attachment to their faith, or who had been more than once on their trial for adopting the illicit religion, were made to pass through a severer ordeal. Instruments unknown in the criminal practice of Rome, and many of them never seen till the moment of their being produced in courtappalling by their gigantic magnitude, or the mysterious terrors with which they were arrayed, tried the fortitude of such influential and determined opponents of the established worship. After the first paroxysm of suffering was over, the question was again put in a stern and solemn voice from the bench, "Will you now renounce Christ? Are you prepared to sacrifice?" The silence or the denial of the prisoner was instantly followed by a fresh signal to repeat the torture, or to carry him back to his cell, whence he should be brought out at another time for fresh barbarities. This alternate course of torture and confinement multitudes endured for years, till either death released them from further sufferings, or they gratified their persecutors by a base recantation. Some magistrates, who had rendered themselves notorious by the introduction of every variety of infernal machines, were wont to make it a matter of public boasting, that their

administration was unstained by the effusion of human blood; and a Bithynian governor in particular, celebrated as a glorious victory, the fall of a Christian, who, after two years of unbending fortitude, sank under the incessant application of his refined cruelties, and purchased inglorious release, by denying the Lord

that bought him.

Trials in which the torture was employed, are familiar to the student of church history; * and in regard to all of them that occurred in the times of the latter Pagan emperors of Rome, it may be remarked, that endless as was the variety of new tortures then introduced into the practice of the tribunals, the application of them was not left altogether to the caprice or humour of the magistrate, but was regulated by the rule of custom, which had both originated a set of leading questions relative to the acknowledgment of the power and worship of the gods, and the abjuring of Christianity, and had determined that every negative answered to one of those questions should be followed by its appropriate measure of punishment or mode of torture. Indeed, so much of the duty of a Roman magistrate, towards the close of the first three centuries, consisted in judging in matters of religion, that a large part of the jurisprudence of the empire was employed in fixing a scale, according to which degrees of punishment or torture should be awarded to the adherents of the new and illegal worship. The fame of the celebrated lawyer, Ulpian, arose from the skill and industry with which he classified and commented on the laws respecting the treatment of the Christians; and incredible as it may seem, no incon-

^{*} Several examples of such trials will be found in Lord Hailes' Remains of Christian Antiquity. We have given the above at large, not from any fondness for such scenes of inhuman barbarity, but that the modern reader may know something of the terrible ordeal through which the primitive Christians were made to pass in contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. To this harrowing recital we may apply an observation made by the ancient historian Eusebius, on a similar case:—"I doubt not that the things which ensued will appear incredible to every one except eyewitnesses, yet must I needs record them."

siderable portion of the learning and experience of the age was bestowed on describing the most approved and certain means of recovering those under torture from fainting, and of preserving them for fresh sufferings.

The application of these systematic tortures to the primitive Christians, was not more inhuman and barbarous in itself, than the object for which they were practised was a violation of every principle of justice. In all other cases, where the Roman law sanctioned the use of the torture, the design was to bring out a confession of guilt from the accused, and by prostrating his resolution through extremity of pain, to extort from him that information which threats and persuasion were ineffectual to obtain. The thief was racked in order that he might be brought to confess his robbery, —the murderer that he might plead guilty to the deed of blood,—the wretch who was accused of treasonable designs against the State, that he might name his accomplices in the conspiracy, and make a full disclosure of all the circumstances of the plot; and however revolting to humanity, and at variance with all enlightened ideas of judicial procedure, were such violent means of convicting the accused, many prudential reasons could be urged to justify their employment, in cases where persons, charged with crimes that threatened the peace and stability of society, could not be otherwise wrought upon to admit their guilt. But never till the religion of Christ became an object of persecution, and a war of extermination was proclaimed against the Christian name, was it heard of, that men were subjected to torture, in order that they might be made, not to confess, but deny the crime imputed to them. The Christians at once, and unreservedly, confessed that they were followers of Christ, —that they observed his worship, and studied the Scriptures. Instead, however, of their frank confession being of any avail to them, the torture was forthwith applied, to force them to depart from it, and they who

adhered to that expression of their faith were generally tried by the rack, with a measure of severity proportioned to the firm and manly resolution with which they "witnessed the good confession." Stedfastness was followed by an increase of tortures, and the scourge or the flesh-hooks, the horse, or a night in the stocks, was the doom of the intrepid believer who was resolved to obey God rather than man. But the moment he denied Christ, or his attachment to the Gospel appeared to waver,—the moment he consented to join in the rites of idolatry, or render the slightest token of homage to the gods, the executioner was stopped in his horrid office, and the instruments of torture disap-To other criminals, of whatever description, who concealed or falsified, the utmost violence was used to force them to confess the truth of the accusation against them. To the Christians, who concealed nothing, who disclosed all, the same inhuman violence was employed, to make them renounce their confession, and proclaim themselves to be what they really were not.

Nor was this the only strange feature of the proceedings carried on at the Roman tribunals against the Christians. The whole course of the judicial inquiries of the magistrates,—the entire principles they adopted in acquitting and condemning the believers, were, in every respect, the reverse of what they adopted in other cases. Criminals accused of the greatest outrages against the laws of society were, in Rome, as in every well-regulated State, considered innocent till their guilt was proven. Counsel were allowed them, and the most patient and impartial examination was made into the whole amount of evidence against them, ere punishment of any kind could be awarded against Roman citizens. But, in the case of Christians, no private or professional friend was allowed to speak in their defence,—no witnesses were summoned in their cause, -not the slightest investigation was made into

the circumstances alleged against their character or their life, beyond some inquiries into their willingness to sacrifice and return to the worship of the gods. The Christians were by law not to be searched after,—an enactment which was clearly founded on a tacit assumption of their innocence,—and yet it was ordained, that when they were brought to the tribunals, they were to be punished as criminals. The Christians were charged with the murder of infants, with feasting on human flesh, and with a variety of unnatural crimes; and yet, although no one was ever found able or willing to depone to the truth of those calumnies,although no magistrate, notwithstanding all his official powers to enter the assemblies of the believers at all times, and with the prospect of a civic crown, and the applause of the whole empire to animate his researches, ever made the discovery of any such enormities being practised by that people, their name was identified with the blackest iniquity. The Christians were reputed the worst of men,-without religion,-without morality,—disaffected to the emperors,—the common enemies of mankind,—the greatest criminals in the world; and yet, on their simply bowing to an image, or throwing a few grains of incense upon an altar, the magistrates were willing, with all those alleged enormities, to let them loose on society. The burden of the accusations brought against them was their name, and the grand object sought at the tribunals, was to induce them to abjure it; and yet it must have been manifest, that the name might have been abandoned, while attachment to all that was obnoxious in Christianity continued as ardent and stedfast as ever.* In short, in the whole of these trials, every dictate of humanity, every principle of honour, every consideration of enlightened policy, was set at defiance. But why speak of justice and consistency, or look for any traces of calm and impartial legislation, in pro-* These arguments are dwelt upon with great power, and at great length, by Tertullian, Apol., chap. 11.

ceedings which originated in, and were throughout characterised by, a combination of malice and ignorance, which the Roman magistrates and people would not have tolerated in any other case. Entertaining universally the most rooted detestation to the Christian name,—in their vehement desire to extirpate which, all classes eagerly vied with each other,—they showed a firm determination to keep themselves in ignorance of what the Christians either were or did. And hence, to use the words of Tertullian,—"nothing is attended to in their trials, but how to inflame the mob, and, therefore, the inquiry is about the name only. All greedily devour the most infamous reports against them, and are so averse to any legal inquiry, lest those reports should prove false, which they are anxious should be received as true, that the odious name of Christian might be condemned upon presumption, without the risk of insufficient proof, and that the bare confession of that name might be equivalent to a conviction of the crimes imputed to those who hold it. Hence it is, that when they proceed to judgment, and read over the catalogues of those they pass sentence against, they mention the name only. They make no allusion to the infanticide, the incest, and the other monstrous crimes imputed to the Christians. They alone are the persons you are ashamed to condemn, without specifying the actions you condemn them for. If a Christian is proved guilty of no crime, the name surely must be of a most singular nature, to involve such criminality in itself alone." * Such being the tremendous pains and penalties to which those who in the first ages confessed Christ before men, and adopted the name of Christians, were exposed, what reason have we to bless God, that the times are so happily changed, that we are not now called to endure the same fiery ordeal, and that, in unbroken peace and security, we can maintain our religious profession!

^{*} Tertullian's Apology, chap. ii.

Those who died under the violent tortures to which they were subjected, were alone at first honoured with the designation of martyrs; while those who were redeemed from slavery, or returned from exile, went under the general name of confessors,—a name which in primitive times was held in the highest estimation, and which, implying that they who bore it had suffered on account of their religion, or had made some public confession of Christ before the tribunals of their country, came afterwards to bear the same meaning with that of martyrs. Notwithstanding the elaborate attempts that have been made by some writers in modern times, admirers of the political constitution and the imperial masters of the Roman world, to reduce the number of the martyrs to an inconsiderable amount, and to treat as fabulous and romantic the story of their extraordinary wrongs, there is unchallengeable evidence, that those who in primitive times suffered on account of their attachment to the Christian faith, comprehended a prodigious multitude. It is impossible, indeed, owing to the anomalous course of all persecutions, and the want of contemporary records in many parts of the world, which were anciently the distracted seat of those disorders, to form any accurate estimate of the numbers who, during the long period that intervened between the age of the apostles and the establishment of Christianity, sealed their testimony to the truth with their blood. But as, during the whole of that time, the Church was harassed by an almost unbroken series of assaults from without,as there can scarcely be said to have been an interval, however short, during the course of the three first centuries, when war was not waged in some of the numerous provinces of the empire against the devoted Christians;—as multitudes of that obnoxious class, in every walk of life, perished amid the excesses of popular tumult, or by the secret violence of unbelieving relatives, without a memorial of their name, or a

record of their existence being transmitted to posterity, -there is evidently no exaggeration in affirming, that the number of martyrdoms must have been immensely great. It is admitted that there were many, especially towards the latter half of the primitive age, who, though they met with a premature and violent death on account of their connection with Christianity, seem to have had very doubtful claims to be ranked in the character of martyrs. Forgetting the salutary admonition of Christ to his earliest disciples, when they were persecuted in one place, to flee to another, multitudes of Christians in that declining period of the Church, courted, rather than shunned, the fire or the sword of their enemies; and thinking that they could not too soon attain the crown of glory, which was promised to such as are faithful unto death, rushed into the presence of the Pagan magistrates and priests, proclaiming themselves to be Christians, and thereby hoping to anticipate the change which might otherwise too slowly arrive in the natural course of providence. In some, this violent desire of suffering, which at one period strongly prevailed, arose, there is reason to think, from mixed motives, one of which might be ambition of the extraordinary honours that were heaped on the memory, and the pious care that was taken of the mortal remains of those who perilled their lives for the sake of the truth ;-honours, the witnessing of which had produced in their minds the highest admiration of that kind of death, and a vehement wish to tread the same thorny path to the glory that followed it, both in this world and in the next.* In others,

^{*} This conduct was disapproved of by the more enlightened and pious in the ancient Church.—Fleury, Hist. Eccles., ii. 465. "That the poor hunted Christians should take to cover, was the precept of their heavenly Master, and it was religiously observed by the sober Christians of the primitive ages. Some, indeed, of warm imaginations, chose to be more zealous than their Lord recommended, and encountered that persecution which He had counselled them to shun. The progress of Christianity was marvellously rapid; and hence one great argument of its divine origin; yet, probably, the progress of Christianity would have been more rapid, and the argument thence arising would have been more illustrious, had the persecuted Christians always observed the precept which our Lord gave them."—Hailes' Christ. Antiq., vol. ii. p. 107.

there is as little doubt, it proceeded solely from a pure and fervid, but mistaken zeal, which deemed it a duty on all occasions, however unseasonable, and by every means, however extravagant, to bear testimony to the honour and cause of Christ, and which was often so imprudently displayed, as seriously to injure the cause it honestly meant to advance. In this description we rank the conduct of two Christian brothers, Apphian and Œdesius, who, in the reign of Diocletian, suffered at different times indeed, but in circumstances nearly the same. The first was a young man of twenty, of high literary accomplishments, who, parting with his family, and relinquishing all the hopes of emolument and distinction which his rank in life held out to him, for the sake of the Gospel, emigrated from his native Lycia to Cesarca. He had been only a few days in that provincial capital, when, at a public festival which the governor, Urbanus, celebrated in person, he ran towards the magistrate, at the moment he was making a libation, and seizing him by the right arm, boldly commanded him, in presence of the assembled people, to cease from his idolatrous act of worship, and then proceeded, in a hasty manner, to exhort him to turn from idols to the living God. As might have been expected, he paid on the spot the penalty of his imprudent interference. Being apprehended by some of the guard, he was ordered to sacrifice, and on refusal, was subjected to a series of the most dreadful tortures, after which his mangled body was tossed into the sea. His brother, Œdesius, who was still more eminent as a young philosopher, had also been converted to the principles of the Christian faith, and gave ample proof of his sincerity, by his undergoing frequent imprisonments, and by the grinding servitude he endured for years in the mines of Pales-Restored at length to liberty, he visited Alexandria, where, among the first objects of his curiosity, as usual with foreign Christians in those days, he re-

paired to the tribunal to hear any cause that might be in the course of trial relating to Christianity. The presiding judge was the philosopher Hierocles, who was carrying matters against the poor Christians with a high hand, inflicting every species of torture upon the men, and condemning young as well as elderly women to the most infamous usage. Indignant at the unprincipled defiance of all justice and moderation in the proceedings, the young Œdesius forgot his situation, addressed a pointed rebuke to the governor, and struck him a violent blow. Lingering tortures were instantly ordered for the indiscreet assailant-who ere long died under their violent effects. The sincere, but injudicious zeal of these two brothers, was the fault of the age rather than of the men.* Imperfectly acquainted with the rules of the Gospel, and blending with its spirit the influence of a false philosophy, the Christians of those days, with all the sincerity that fitted them for becoming martyrs, wanted much of the simplicity and meekness of the Christian character; and hence, many of them, throwing themselves, from pure and exalted motives, indeed, but in an obtrusive and offensive manner, in the way of the heathen magistrates, met a violent end, which must be laid at the door, not so much of the enemies of Christ, as of their own forward and imprudent behaviour. Besides these, there were a few, and but a few, who, from want of courage to face the tortures with which they were threatened, yet ardently attached to Christianity, thought themselves justified in anticipating the fate that certainly awaited them, by committing suicide. Men precipitated themselves from the roofs of high houses, or the tops of lofty trees, and women threw themselves into the sea in order to avoid a worse misfortune from the hands of the licentious soldiers. + Nor were there wanting some also, who, charged with

^{*} So entirely were such acts in accordance with the prevailing spirit of the times, that the historian Eusebius uniformly commends them. † Eusebius, book iii. chap. xvi.; Fleury, Hist. Eccl., ii. p. 570.

capital crimes, or with defrauding the public revenue, and liable to be tried as felons, exposed themselves to be apprehended, under the assumed name of Christians, with the view either of dying, what was thought by some a more honourable death, or experiencing the benefits of Christian charity in prison. But still, after the most liberal deductions from the lists of reputed confessors—of those whose claims to that high character were entirely spurious as well as of those whose sufferings and death were the direct consequences of their own indiscreet zeal-the numbers that remain to compose the noble army of martyrs are, to the disgrace of humanity and the honour of religion, great almost beyond belief. It is a gross violation of the truth of history, to represent the enemies of Christianity as confining their selection of victims to the opposite extremes of society; -as, on the one hand, making examples principally of the pastors and other influential characters of the Church, whose violent fate might strike terror into the rest of the Christian body; or else, on the other, wreaking their fellest vengeance on such believers as were of a servile condition, about whose lives, the manners of antiquity naturally disposed the Romans to entertain a careless indifference.* The authorities adduced for such statements, far from supporting such a view of the limited rank and number of the martyrs, speak a very different language, and none but those who have read the ancient history of the Church with eyes completely blinded, or strongly jaundiced by prejudice, could have adopted an opinion so strangely at variance with the entire spirit and tenor of the testimonies borne by the fathers and eyewitnesses of the persecutions. Vague and rhetorical expressions, indeed, and statements drawn in the exaggerating style of an orator, which represent the empire as deluged with rivers of Christian blood, or describe cities as entirely destroyed, no sincere in-

^{*} Gibbon, chap. xvi.

quirer after truth will found upon, as determining the number of those who suffered for righteousness' sake, any more than he will admit the spurious evidence of those legendary tales which were given to the world, when the credulity of later ages received, on the most slender grounds, every new claimant for the honours of martyrdom. But still, in the more ancient and sober records of the Church, there is a melaneholy abundance of materials to enable us to ascertain the truth with as near an approach to precision as the nature of the subject will admit of; and without meaning to assert, that there were "legions of martyrs" in primitive times, as an eminent writer sneeringly calls them, we pronounce it to be an undeniable fact, that latterly every real and stedfast Christian, of whatever rank or profession, was involved in the general crusade against the religion of Jesus, and that vast numbers were brought to a premature and violent death. Indeed, the reader has only to reflect on what the passions of men are capable of perpetrating, when roused into action, without any cheek or control, and he cannot doubt, that the number of those who died in the cause of Christ must have been far greater than could be related by any historian. Multitudes, who were never brought before the eyes of the world, died of their tortures in prison, or by hard labour in the mines. Multitudes also, who took refuge in the deserts and among the mountains, perished of cold, hunger, and thirst, or became a prey to beasts and robbers. * Eusebius tells us, that at one period in Egypt, the Christians were executed to the number of 10, 20, sometimes even 100 a-day; and that in another place, when he was on the spot, so many heads were struck off, that the hatchet became blunted

^{*} Among those who did so, was a venerable bishop of one of the chief cities in Egypt, with his wife. He had taken refuge among the solitudes of an Arabian mountain, where both of them died—by what means is unknown—as no trace of them could be found beyond a few mouldering bones.

-that more than one of the axes was broken, and that the executioners were so wearied with slaughter, that they took their horrid office by turns. * Tertullian informs us, that 20,000 Christians were burned by Diocletian's order on one Christmas Day. † And "Monsieur Godeau reckons, that in the last persecution, there were no fewer than 17,000 persons killed in one month's space—that in the province of Egypt alone during the same persecution, no less than 144,000 died by the violence of the persecutors, and 700,000 perished through the fatigues of banishment, or of the public works to which they were condemned." # The whole amount of Christians who were martyred by the Roman emperors, during the three first centuries, is estimated by Jerome to be at the rate of 5000 a-day every day in the year except one-that is, they put to death, at different times during the primitive age, 1,820,000 souls.§

So effectually was the last persecution supposed to have crushed the Christian faith, that pillars were erected in honour of the emperor, with these inscriptions,-" Diocletian, Jovian, Maximian, Hercules, for having extended the Roman empire in the east and west, and for having extinguished the name of Christians, who brought the republic to ruin." "Diocletian Cesar Augustus, for having adopted Galerius in the east, for having every where abolished the super-stition of Christ." Stronger evidence could not be adduced, than what these inscriptions afford, that the enemies of Christianity were implacable, and that the persecutions they waged against it were awfully profuse

in Christian blood.

It is a painful task to record such scenes of inhuman cruelty and blood, as those which have been described

^{*} Fleury, Hist. Eccles., ii. p. 212-435. † Eusebius quoted Fleury, ii. p. 428. ‡ Calamy's Sermon on Matt. xvi. 18.—The reign of Diocletian was emphatically called by Christians, "The Era of Martyrs." § Simpson's Plea for Religion.

in the preceding pages,—more especially when we remember, that the unhappy victims to whom the rack, the stake, combats with wild beasts, and the refusal of the decencies of burial, were so barbarously awarded, were not of that vile and abandoned class, who forfeit by their crimes all claims on the sympathies of men, and deserve the wretched end to which they are doomed; but persons of unblemished reputation, virtuous principles, and most peaceful habits; who, having embraced the doctrines of Christ as the only true religion, were too honest to disguise their opinions, or who, to say the worst, committed no greater crime than to betray an imprudent zeal in proclaiming truths which they believed inseparably associated with the glory of God, and the highest interests of man.

CHAPTER VII.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

NOTICES OF EMINENT MARTYRS—POLYCARP—PTOLEMY AND LUCIUS—PER-SECUTION AT LYONS—BIBLIAS—FRUCTUOSUS—PERPETUA AND FELICITAS —CYPRIAN—CYRIL—SAPRICIUS AND NICEPHORUS—ROMANUS—EUPLIUS —MAXIMUS—IRENÆUS—PHILIP—MARTYRS OF CÆSAREA—FELIX.

IF we were asked to specify the periods of history that furnish the amplest materials for tales of romantic interest and tragic adventure, we should appeal to those times that have been most deeply convulsed by struggles for religious liberty and the rights of conscience; and among those periods, we should, without hesitation, appeal to the history of the primitive age of the Church, as, from the long duration of the war against Christianity, and the extensive field on which it was fought, pre-eminently fertile in narratives exhibiting the most exalted virtue in circumstances of severest difficulty and distress. When we consider the multitudes of men and women of whom the world was not worthy, who, because they could not violate the dictates of conscience, and disobey God, were, for years, condemned to pine in the dungeon and labour in the mines, uncheered by the light of the sun or the presence of a friend; and the many others who were hunted like partridges on the mountains, and obliged to hide themselves in dens and caves of the earth, -to brave the rigours of the

season, and endure the want of food and clothing, or were pressed into the service of pirates, or carried off by robbers and sold as slaves;—when we think of the many ties of nature, the parental and filial bonds which the adoption of Christianity so painfully severed, or the cruel vows formed, and expeditions entered into by the heathen, to drag their believing fathers or sons from their places of concealment, and, perhaps, Brutus-like, plunge the poignard into their bosoms by their own unnatural hands; -when we think of all the indignities and the dangers which the foregoing pages have described, as besetting the path of the primitive Christians, it must appear that their times and their history yield to none, or rather surpass every other, in stories of harrowing interest and individual misfortune. But so many of these stories of the lives of the martyrs have, through the embellishment of credulous and of superstitious admirers, become disfigured with incredible wonders, and so many more date their origin at a later period, when the invention of legends of the saints had become a source of profitable speculation, that we think it better to leave them to the oblivion they deserve, than endeavour to swell our volume with a recital of laborious travels, hair-breadth escapes, and strange deliverances, in which, though they might give to our pages the interest of tales of romance, it is difficult to distinguish what is true from what is fictitious. The ecclesiastical historians of the period, in giving an account of the martyrs, have, in general, contented themselves with detailing the circumstances that attended their apprehension, and the Christian nobleness of deportment they exhibited at their death,being more desirous to record what may be useful for the instruction and imitation of posterity, than what might tend to delight the fancy or to interest the feelings of their readers; and, in proposing to dedicate this chapter to a description of some of those bright stars, the lustre of whose faith and virtues illumined the horizon of the primitive age, we shall, after their example, reject those moving accidents by flood and field, and that machinery of supernatural agents, which some later writers have allowed themselves to introduce for the purpose of dignifying the subjects of their story, and confine ourselves to those authentic incidents relating to the close of their lives, which have been transmitted through the purest channels of

history.

Among the Christians who fell under the persecuting sword of the emperor Aurelius, the most eminent for station and character was Polycarp. That venerable man had filled the office of pastor in the Church of Smyrna for more than eighty years, and had won golden opinions among all classes of Christians for his fervent zeal and fidelity to his ministerial duties, and for the uncommon piety and excellence of his character. Moreover, he had been the familiar friend of John, and was then the only surviving contemporary of the apostles, a circumstance which contributed in no small degree to inspire the reverence of his Christian brethren; and having drunk deep of the sources of heavenly comfort and joy which are contained in the Gospel, his presence and ministry were an invaluable treasure to the Christians, at a time "when men's hearts were failing them for fear." On a festive occasion in the city, when, as usual, a series of public shows were contemplated for the amusement of the people, the introduction of some Christians into the amphitheatre to fight with wild beasts, was resolved on as a grateful addition to the sports of the day. Polycarp being, of course, one of the first included in the lists of the doomed, his sorrowing friends prevailed on him, with great difficulty, to take refuge in an obscure village in the neighbourhood, where, in the society of a few of his brethren who accompanied him, he occupied himself, as usual, day and night, in offering up prayer for the peace and prosperity of all

the churches. His asylum being at length discovered, he got notice just in time to escape the hands of the police, who, finding themselves disappointed in the object of their pursuit, seized two of his servants, and forced them, by torture, to betray the second retreat of their master. In consequence of this information, the house to which he had fled was suddenly surrounded; and although Polycarp, who was engaged in his devotions in the upper storey, might easily have effected his escape along the flat roofs of the houses, yet, concluding that his hour, which he had long foreseen, was now come, and meekly saying-"The will of God be done," he went down to surrender himself to the officers. It being about the usual supper time, and learning that his pursuers were overcome with the fatigue of a whole day's travel, he courteously provided an ample refreshment for them; and begged only in return, that, while they were busy eating and drinking, he might be allowed one hour to continue his devotions. His request was granted, and out of the abundance of his heart, which overflowed with the grace of God, he poured forth his supplication for the space of two hours with a fervour, benevolence, and holy earnestness, which so rivetted the attention, and touched the feelings of the ruthless soldiery, that some of them almost hesitated to lay hands on so venerable a man. At the conclusion of the impressive scene, he rose, and having intimated to the officers that he was ready to follow them, he was placed on an ass and conducted to the city. On his way to Smyrna he was met by Herod, one of the chief magistrates, who, along with his father Nicetes, affected to treat him with so much sympathy and kindness as to take him into their chariot. Many a flattering argumentmany an anxious effort they made to shake his constancy, but finding it impregnable, they violently thrust him out of the vehicle, and obliged him to walk the rest of his journey on foot with his guards. On the

news of Polycarp's arrival at the amphitheatre, shouts of wild and tumultuous joy were raised by the crowded populace; and although several Christians had been sacrificed, their insatiable thirst for the blood of the devoted disciples could not be appeared until the man who was universally reputed their chief met the fate of his brethren. "This," was resounded from all quarters, "is the father of the Christians—the enemy of the gods,—who teaches multitudes not to sacrifice nor offer any worship." And the utmost impatience was manifested to see him engaged in mortal combat with a lion. But the proconsul, who, as well as the officers, was strongly prepossessed in favour of the aged bishop, and probably wished to save him, refused to give the orders, on the pretext that the appointed time for the exhibition of these furious fights had expired. "Let him be burnt alive, then," was the frantic cry of the enraged and disappointed crowd; upon which Philip, finding himself compelled to comply, gave the signal, and immediately Jew and Gentile ran with the most impetuous haste to fetch wood from the workshops, market-places, baths, and whereever they could most readily find it, to construct the funeral pile of the devoted Christian. During these preparations, some of the officers stepped forward to tie his hands behind his back, and fasten him with nails to the pile, but begging them to leave him free, he stretched out his hands, after the fashion of the primitive age, in prayer; and while he was expressing his joy and gratitude for being counted worthy to suffer for the name, and commending his soul into the hands of his Saviour, the flames arose, choked his farther utterance, and in a short time reduced his body to ashes. His martyrdom happened in the year 166.*

In the same year, Ptolemy and Lucius suffered at Rome in circumstances that gave a singular interest

^{*} Hailes' Christ. Antiq., vol. i. p. 9.

to the story of their martyrdom. The detection and condemnation of these two Christians arose accidentally out of their connection, which was remote, with the case of a female convert, whose altered character and views had called forth the angry and vindictive passions of her husband. Previous to her adoption of the Christian faith, this woman, it appears, had led, together with her partner, a most abandoned life; and being convinced that such loose and profligate habits were utterly inconsistent with the purity of the Gospel, she had not only herself renounced them at her baptism, but directed her most earnest and persevering efforts to reclaim her husband from his irregular and vicious course of life. His mind, however, continuing unaltered, frequent and violent feuds disturbed their domestic intercourse, all of which she bore with the meekness and patience of a Christian, and betook herself to fervent prayer that the Lord would open the heart of her degraded and guilty husband, as he did that of Lydia, to attend to the things spoken by her. The wished for change, however, did not take place; and, as he every day plunged deeper into vice, and, of course, grew more violent and intolerable in his bearing towards her, she resolved on the painful step of a separation. Impelled by implacable rage, he informed against her as a Christian; and, on some obstacle being interposed to her appearance at the tribunal, he transferred the whole weight of his vengeance on Ptolemy, who was a much respected friend of hers, and her instructor in Christianity. Him, also, he publicly accused of being a disciple of the forbidden worship; and, as Ptolemy was too honest to dissemble, and too strong in the faith to abandon it from any fear of temporal consequences, he was forthwith cast into prison. After having lain a long time in confinement, he was brought out for a fresh examination as to his religion, and having to every inquiry returned the uniform answer that he was

a Christian, he was ordered for immediate execution. The trial and sentence of this man was heard by another Christian, of the name of Lucius, who, not being able to suppress his indignation at the want of all decency and justice in condemning a man who had been convicted of no crime, and to whose charge no imputation could be laid but that of calling himself by the name of Christian, remonstrated with the magistrate on the folly and iniquity of his conduct, and ventured to hint that it ill became the character of a philosophic emperor to permit or sanction such proceedings. "I perceive thou also art one of them," was the brief and haughty reply of the judge. On Lucius acknowledging that he was, he, too, was condemned on the spot, and both Ptolemy and his interceding friend encouraging each other to stand fast, and quit themselves like men, were led to execution, expressing with their latest breath their thankfulness that they were about to be removed from tyrannical and wicked magistrates to the presence and the kingdom of their Father and King in heaven.*

In the year 177, a violent persecution broke out against the Christians of Lyons, among whom many are famous in the annals of martyrology. Although, as usual, they were the most peaceable, industrious, and virtuous inhabitants of the town, yet nowhere, perhaps, was the odium universally attached to their name greater than in that city,—the animosity against them being so intense, that no Christian durst appear in any house except his own,—in the baths, the markets, or any place of public resort whatsoever. The violence of the fierce and insolent populace was unhappily seconded by the local authorities, who seized the best known, in defiance of every principle of humanity and justice, allowed their homes to be plundered and their persons to be maltreated, and then, after all these indignities, cast them into prison, on

^{*} Fleury, vol. i. p. 369.

their avowing themselves Christians, to await the will of the governor. A young man eminent for his rank, and not less for his unbounded generosity, having volunteered to go to the tribunal in behalf of the brethren, and pledged his well known character that they were totally innocent of the vile and unparalleled crimes imputed to them, was arrested and brought into the same condemnation as those of whom he appeared the advocate. His testimony being contradicted by some slaves, who, under the influence of the torture, falsely deponed that they had witnessed the grossest enormities in the houses of their Christian masters, the feelings of the populace were inflamed to madness, -every tie of nature and every bond of relationship was disregarded,—neither age nor sex were spared, and scenes of barbarian excesses ensued that baffle description. In this indiscriminate massacre, multitudes perished on the streets and in houses by the hands of private assassins. Among those who were brought to the tribunal, all, with the exception of ten who recanted, exhibited a constancy and composure under the most exquisite tortures, that showed they were strongly fortified by that faith which overcometh the world. Among the most memorable was Pothinus, the venerable pastor of the place, who, although bending under a load of ninety years, and with a body greatly enfeebled by disease, came forward with a spirit breathing all the vigour and elasticity of youth, to give his testimony to the truth. On his appearance, the governor asked him-" Who is the God of the Christians?" to which he replied,—"You would know Him if you were really desirous to obtain that knowledge." This answer was received with volleys of blasphemy and rage, and the old man, who expected no better treatment, was rudely dragged back, amid the blows and kicks of the bystanders, to prison, where he died in two days. Sanctus, his deacon, was placed at the bar on the removal of the bishop. As he apBIBLIAS. 385

peared young and resolute, the torture was resorted to to break his fortitude. But he sustained the application of repeated cruelties with such indomitable firmness, that all the arts of his tormentors could wring nothing from him but the calm and decisive answer that he was a Christian. Red-hot plates of iron were then applied to the tenderest parts of his body, in consequence of which he was reduced to a ghastly spectacle; and in that state of anguish and debility he was removed to a dark and loathsome cell, to be brought out again a few days after, if alive, to undergo a repetition of the ordeal. On his second appearance, the same method of torture was practised on him as before, but it being found that the burning plates had the effect of reducing his body, which was dreadfully swollen, to its natural shape, and restoring to him the use of his limbs, he was removed to make way for others. All their efforts having proved ineffectual in leading to any discovery of the alleged crimes of the Christians, the magistrates altered their mode of procedure, and, instead of examining any more of the office-bearers of the Church, applied themselves to those, on the weakness of whose age and sex they hoped to make some impression. Biblias, one of those who had at first recanted through fear, was selected as the most fit, from her weak and timorous character, to give the required revelations. She was forthwith put on the torture with a view to her being brought to acknowledge that the Christians were in the habit of eating their children. At first she swooned away, but on recovering denied, in the most firm and peremptory manner, the horrid crime, expressed her sorrow for her former weakness, avowed her attachment to Christ, and was numbered with the martyrs. After this, the populace, fickle, but still unsated with Christian blood, loudly demanded that the Christians in prison should be brought out and exposed to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Orders being given to

provide that favourite spectacle, Sanctus, accompanied by three others, was laid on the sand to await the unkennelling of their savage antagonists. That poor but not unhappy Christian, as if he had not got enough of the torture, was, along with his companions, placed on a heated iron chair, as a final attempt to extort some confession from him. But his uniform answer being as before, that he was a Christian, their mangled bodies were thrown to the beasts, and in a few moments nothing remained of them but the bones. their female companion, was fastened to a stake in the midst of the wild beasts, a situation the most appalling to the weak nerves of a woman. But supporting her mind by prayer, and a steady view of the precious promises of the Gospel, she manifested the most serene composure. None of the beasts, although running loose, caring to touch her, she was reconducted to her prison, and reserved for a future exhibition. Attalus was next introduced, the last, but not the least eminent among the Christians, nor the least obnoxious to the heathen populace of Lyons. He bore upon his breast a board with this inscription,—" This is Attalus the Christian;"—and would have immediately shared the fate of his companions, had it not been discovered that, being a Roman citizen, he could not be condemned without the express permission of the emperor. In a few days the imperial sanction was obtained, and Attalus, along with another who had distinguished himself by his efforts to encourage his brethren to constancy and perseverance, was brought out again to the amphitheatre, where the rage of the persecutors, not trusting to the uncertain humour of the wild beasts, ran them through with the sword. Last of all, a young man, of the name of Ponticus, not exceeding fifteen years of age, who, with refined cruelty, had every day been led out to witness the execution of his aged friends, and been asked, with that appalling spectacle before him, if he would sacrifice, but in vain, was made to go through the whole circle of tortures, and at last, along with Blandina, was thrown to the beasts. The latter had the distinction, after undergoing the ordeal of the iron chair, of being enclosed in a net, and thrown at the feet of a furious bull. The sword at length put a period to her sufferings,—the bystanders exclaiming that never could a woman have exhibited more astonishing fortitude than-Blandina.*

Fructuosus, bishop of Tarracona in Spain, was apprehended, together with his two deacons, on 15th January 259. It happened on the Lord's day, and while he was in his bed-chamber early in the morning, a loud knocking was heard at the gate, which, it was soon ascertained, proceeded from a party of soldiers bearing the emperor's commission. On receiving the startling intelligence, he arose, went down to them in his slippers, and was informed that he was their pri-The bishop submissively answered, that he would be at their service if they would only allow him sufficient time to put on his shoes and dress himself. His request was granted; and after his plain toilet was made, he and his deacons were conveyed to prison; during his whole stay in which, the pious minister continued to pray, without ceasing, for himself and his brethren, that they might be strengthened to witness a good confession. After lying six days in confinement, they were brought out to a public audience of the governor, who, having interrogated them in the usual manner, and found all his efforts unavailing to induce them to acknowledge and worship the gods, condemned them to be burned alive. As the prisoners were being removed to the amphitheatre, the vast crowd of spectators were deeply affected at the condition of Fructuosus, whose amiable character and boundless benevolence had secured him the universal esteem of the heathen as well as the Christian inhabi-

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiq.

tants of the town. Several ran up to him with refreshments and cordials, and every one appeared more anxious than another to bestow their attentions on the venerable man. On his arrival at the amphitheatre, which was destined to be the scene of his last sufferings, his reader approached him with tears in his eyes, and begged to be allowed the honour of untying his sandals, a token of respect which was generally paid to persons of rank and character. But the bishop, smiling with joy, intimated his wish to perform himself that servile office, as well as every other preparatory to his execution. He then prayed for his flock, and for the Church universal, and, turning round to his brethren, comforted them with the prospect of soon receiving, in the good providence of God, another to watch over their souls. When the cords that bound his hands were burnt, and he was consequently at greater liberty, he fell upon his knees, and continued in an attitude of prayer till the flames suffocated him. Thus did Fructuosus and his two deacons enter into the joy of their Lord,—bearing a resemblance to the three children in the fiery furnace. *

The story of Perpetua and Felicitas, who were lovely in their lives, and in their deaths were not divided, possesses an interest second to none in the primitive age. The martyrdom of these two young women took place at Carthage in the year 202. The former was a widow of two and twenty, of respectable rank, great accomplishments, and at that time the nurse of an infant child. In common with all her family, except her father, she had embraced the Christian faith, and was in the course of her preparation for baptism, when information was lodged against her of being a disciple of the forbidden religion. Her father no sooner heard of it, than, feeling the natural anguish of a parent at the danger which threatened his daughter, and still more, dreading the indelible ignominy which

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiq., vol. ii.

her dying in such a cause would entail upon his house, he employed entreaties and commands to prevail with her to recant, or, at least, to shake her resolution to encounter the publicity of the tribunals. Her filial affection, naturally ardent and refined, and heightened by the influence of Christian principle, was severely tried by the affliction into which she had been the occasion of plunging her venerable relative. Deeply as she was affected, her Christian fortitude stood the shock, and her father, finding all his remonstrances ineffectual, desisted. His absence gave her relief, and, without delay, she embraced the opportunity of obtaining baptism. Not many days after she had received that seal of the covenant, she was apprehended and cast into a dungeon, where her distress was almost insupportable, from the darkness and heat of the place occasioned by the number of prisoners, and above all, by anxiety about her child, from which she had been torn. Through the influence and money of two deacons, who brought, as was then customary, the communion to the prisoners, she and her companions were removed to a more airy and comfortable part of the prison, where she enjoyed the unspeakable satisfaction of suckling her child, and, from that circumstance, felt, to use her own language, as happy in prison as if she had been in a palace. A report being widely circulated that the Christian prisoners were to be brought to trial, her father, in an agony of grief, once more sought her presence. Being admitted into her cell, he conjured her, by the affection she cherished for him, by the gratitude she owed him for all his kindness, by the respect she felt for his authority, by the interest she had in her infant son, to have compassion on her family, especially on her child, who, he said, could not survive her, and on his own gray hairs, which would be brought down with sorrow and shame to the grave. At one time he caressed her, and threw himself at her feet in a transport of the liveliest

affection, then he upbraided her with a haughty and stubborn disposition; and at another time, reproached her with causing the ruin of her house, and provoking upon herself an ignominious fate, on account of which none of her family could ever after raise their head in society. The passionate excitement of her father threw Perpetua into a terrible state of agitation. Protesting her love and her reverence for him, and her compassionate sympathy with his lacerated feelings, she, at the same time, gave a mild but firm refusal to all his entreaties to abjure the Gospel,-told him she was grieved to think that he alone, of all her family, did not rejoice at the prospect of her being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ; and that, while nothing on earth would have delighted her more than to please and obey him, she could not do so in a matter where compliance with his wishes would oblige her to displease and disobey God. The next day she was summoned, while dining in company with her fellowprisoners, to the tribunal to be examined in presence of an immense concourse, who had assembled to witness the trial. On its coming to her turn, she was about, in the usual manner, to confess that she was a Christian, when an extraordinary bustle and confusion took place in the quarter occupied by the spectators; and on looking round, she was startled at perceiving her aged father forcing his way through the crowd with her little infant in his arms, to make, in that most affecting attitude, his last desperate attempt to avert what he deemed the irremediable degradation of To the earnest supplications of the old man the governor condescended to add the weight of his counsel, that she should remember her father and her child, and allow herself to sacrifice. She contented herself with the brief reply, that she had lived, and was resolved to die, a Christian. Her father was now ordered to withdraw, and, as he continued to linger to the interruption of the proceedings of the

court, he was saluted with a blow from the rod of an impatient lictor, which, says the affecting narrative of Perpetua, penetrated her inmost soul. Persisting in her confession, she was remanded to prison to await the execution of her sentence, which condemned her to be thrown to wild beasts. The gloom and solitude of her cell were a real relief after the agitating events of the day, and she consoled herself with the hope of once more enjoying the company of her child, ere she should be for ever incapable of taking an interest in that or any other earthly object. Her father, however, refused to part with it, and she bore the cruel disappointment with greater fortitude than she herself had been prepared to anticipate. Nor was she left entirely destitute of earthly comforts, for, through the favour of the jailor, whose sympathies she had won, her relatives and friends were allowed to visit her; and even her father, notwithstanding his deep resentment, prevailed upon himself to solicit a final interview. would have gladly spared herself the painful renewal of his entreaties, but it was not in her nature to deny a father's request, and he was consequently admitted. Frantic with grief, he tore his beard, fell on the floor, resorted to every variety of language and gesture to move her. But her heart was firmly fixed on the hope of Christ, for whom she had left father, and mother, and all that interested her on earth, and the violent excesses of her father's conduct only moved her pity without moving her mind from its settled purpose.

The story of Felicitas, who was a slave, is scarcely less affecting than that of Perpetua. At the time of her imprisonment she was eight months advanced in a state of pregnancy, and the exciting scenes connected with her apprehension, together with her extreme anxiety that she might not be separated from her brethren, but be honoured to seal her testimony along with them, instead of being executed, as she would have been, with thicves and murderers, brought on

the pains of premature confinement. Within three days of the approaching spectacle, at which the Christians were to suffer, she gave birth to a daughter; and during that trying season, when, in addition to the sorrows she felt in common with her companions, she had sorrows peculiar to herself, she exhibited the most amiable and affecting traits of a Christian spirit. To the jailor and his assistants, who tauntingly asked how she hoped to abide the torture of being exposed to the violence of wild beasts, when she was so much overcome with the pains of childbirth, she magnanimously replied, that, in the latter case, she had no support but her own feeble nature, whereas, when she confronted the monsters of the amphitheatre, she would enjoy the divine aids of the Saviour, for whose name she suffered. Her infant daughter was, with fervent prayer, commended to the care of her sister, and thus freed from every source of worldly anxiety, Felicitas joined the poor but happy society of her fellow-prisoners, now increased by the presence of several male members of the Carthaginian church. With hearts so congenial as theirs, this little band of confessors frequently joined together in devotional exercises, which, through the forbearance of the turnkey, they were permitted to do in company; and on the day immediately before their execution they celebrated a love-feast, at which they were joined by those relatives and Christian friends who enjoyed the liberty of visiting them. Many of their Pagan fellow-citizens also, who had been acquainted with them, were present as spectators of the solemn and affecting scene, which, together with the exhortations that accompanied it, was blessed for the conversion of not a few. On the strangers taking leave, one of the brethren desired them to observe the countenances of the Christian prisoners, that they might be the better able to distinguish them on the following day, and notice the calm tranquillity and animating hope with which those whose hearts were given to Christ would meet the last

enemy.

At the hour of exhibiting the shows next day, they were led out, all of them, even Perpetua, who had been greatly exhausted by her efforts to soothe her father, and Felicitas, though still weak in consequence of her recent confinement, walking with a firm and elastic step, as if to a marriage instead of a mortal combat. At the gate of the amphitheatre an unexpected occurrence still farther called forth all their Christian energy. It had been customary from time immemorial for those who were condemned to wild beasts, to be habited in white dresses,—the men like the priests of Saturn—the women like the priestesses of Ceres; and, on their arrival at the place of execution, they found persons in attendance to supply them with that Pagan attire. With one voice they revolted from the odious ceremony, complaining vehemently of the cruel injustice of forcing on them usages, for refusing to comply with which they chose to die rather than preserve their lives; and at length succeeded in extorting from the tribune an immunity from the annoying imposition. They were all then conducted into the amphitheatre singing hymns; and while some of them called the magistrates and people to remember that they would have to give an account of that day's transactions, others invited them to notice that they died in the faith of that Saviour whom, having not seen, they loved, and in whom, though as yet they saw him not, they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The beasts were then let loose, and the poor women, as if their high-minded and courageous behaviour had deserved the deadliest revenge of their enemies, were made to stand by, and have their sufferings cruelly increased by witnessing the harrowing spectacle of all their male companions successively mangled by the ravenous jaws of lions, leopards, and bears. Their

own time being come at last, they were, amid many circumstances of brutal insult and savage ferocity, enclosed in a net and exposed to a wild cow. The infuriated brute made first for Perpetua, whom it tossed and trampled upon, till she fell helpless on her back. Then running against Felicitas, it soon made her a horrid spectacle of gore and wounds. Meanwhile availing herself of the momentary absence of her maddening foe, Perpetua composed her disordered dress and hair, and rising up, and perceiving her companion more severely hurt than herself, took her by the hand, and assisted her to her feet. From whatever cause, whether the beast was wearied, or the spectators were moved with compassion for the distressed women, they were then withdrawn from the combat to another place, where criminals were usually despatched with the sword. Giving each other the kiss of peace, they then presented themselves to the arm of the executioner. Felicitas was killed by a single blow; but Perpetua, falling into the hands of a trembling or unskilful gladiator, was repeatedly struck and severely wounded in vain; and this heroic woman, preserving her Christian fortitude to the last, was observed calmly directing the soldier to the best and most expeditious way of performing his duty, -which, being done, she was numbered with the martyrs. *

The martyrdom of Cyprian occurred in the year 258. This illustrious servant of Christ was advanced in life before he was converted from heathenism; but that memorable change of mind was in him no less rapid than it was permanent, and, under the effectual teaching of the Spirit, he made wonderful progress in the knowledge and experience of true religion, and gave a noble example of its power in a life of activity and zeal in the cause of his Divine Master, that has never been surpassed. His high character for literary

^{*} Fleury, vol. ii. p. 26.

and spiritual attainments soon raised him to the dignified office of bishop of Carthage; and such was his ardour and indefatigable devotion as a Christian minister, that he acquired unbounded influence, and was universally looked up to as the chief man among the Christians in that quarter of the world. About the ninth year of his ministry, he was summoned by Paternus, the proconsul of Africa, to a private conference respecting his willingness to obey a recent edictissued from Rome. But as that edict required all men, of whatever opinion, to conform to the religious rites of the Romans, and Cyprian, firmly but respectfully, declared it impossible for him, as a Christian, to comply, he was banished to a small sea-port on the northern coast of Africa. Eleven months he passed in this place of exile, continuing unabated, in that remote sphere, his labours in the service of his Master, when, on the accession of a new governor to the province, he was recalled from banishment. On his return to Carthage he fixed his residence in the neighbourhood of that city, on a splendid estate, which, after he had sold it for the purposes of charity, had, by a singular dispensation of Providence, reverted to the original owner. In that tranquil retreat he resumed the pastoral charge of his church, which once more became large and flourishing through the efforts of his apostolic zeal. But the persecution of Valerian, which burst like a thundercloud on the capital, was rapidly travelling to discharge a violent storm on the churches of Africa. And, as it was easily foreseen, come when it would, that Cyprian was too prominent a character to escape with impunity, a number of the most influential people in Carthage, heathens as well as Christians,—for his great benevolence had endeared him to all classes,-waited upon him, and offered him the use of various country places where he might conceal himself till the tempest blew past. But Cyprian, though he prudently avoided every thing that

might provoke the rage of persecution against himself, did not think it was his duty to retire from the sphere which Providence had assigned him. He was, accordingly, summoned to the tribunal; but as the governor was then residing at Utica, for the benefit of that watering-place, and the bishop was most anxious that his death, if it were resolved upon, should take place within the precincts of his pastoral territory, and before the eyes of his beloved people, that they might be edified and strengthened by his last testimony to the truth, he did accede, in these circumstances, to the counsel of his friends, and withdrew into temporary concealment. No sooner, however, had the proconsul returned to Carthage, than this Christian hero, fearing lest his concealment might, to his own prejudice, and to the prejudice of the Gospel, be construed into a cowardly flight, came back publicly, and took up his residence, as formerly, in his well known villa, calmly leaving the issue in the hand of his Divine Master. Intelligence of his return soon reached the ears of the governor, by whom two officers were despatched to apprehend him. Prepared for such a summons, he readily surrendered, and was conveyed in a chariot to a small sea-port, about six miles from Carthage, whither a fresh attack of indisposition had obliged the proconsul to retire. The trial was fixed to take place the following day, and immense crowds flocked to Sexti, the scene of that memorable transaction, attracted by the deep interest that was universally felt in the fate of a man whose praise was in all the churches. He was lodged for the night in the house of the chief officer of the town, who, though appointed his guard, treated him with the greatest kindness, and even carried his courtesy so far as to allow some of the bishop's most intimate friends the gratification of a parting interview. During the whole night multitudes of men and women, his attached people from Carthage, stood in the streets before the house, full of anxiety to see, or at least to hear, something of their favourite pastor, who gave a beautiful trait of his own affectionate interest in them by repeated messages of Christian counsel. Fearing, from the prodigious interest excited about the fate of Cyprian, that there might be some popular commotion, the proconsul summoned the attendance of a numerous guard, under the protection of which he next day held the assizes for the examination of this famous Christian. The trial, which was conducted without the use of torture, was short, and all the usual leading inquiries, made on such occasions, having been answered in such a way as satisfied the judge that Cyprian, who acknowledged himself the leader of the Christians, was irrevocably attached to Christianity, that officer pronounced the sentence, that "this ringleader of the impious sect" should be beheaded.* The martyr received the judgment not only with submission but with thanks, and the vast multitude of his brethren followed him to the place of execution, venting exclamations of the most passionate grief. A guard of soldiers, marching on each side, led him to a spacious plain, in the neighbourhood of Sexti, full of lofty trees, which multitudes climbed to witness the closing scene. Arrived at the spot, the martyr, having put some pieces of money into the hand of the executioner, to show that he died in peace with him and all mankind, took off his upper garment, and then kneeling down, prayed for a few moments fervently, after which he rose, and, stripping himself of all but his long linen shirt, presented himself to the executioner, who, allowing two of his friends to bind his hands, and place some napkins to receive the head with decency, addressed himself to his office, and at one blow laid the

^{*} One reason why Galerius, who was deeply prejudiced against the Christians, conducted Cyprian's trial with unusual humanity and dispatch might arise from the state of his health, which was so bad that he was scarcely able to pronounce the sentence. He died in a few days after.

once active and indomitable Cyprian a lifeless trunk in the dust.*

A young child called Cyril, appeared among the martyrs in the same persecution that proved fatal to Cyprian, and by his uncommon fortitude produced a prodigious sensation in Cæsarea, where he resided. Having been instructed by some neighbours in the principles of the Gospel, and, having received the truth in the love of it, he became an eminent example of the inspired statement, that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings the Lord has often perfected his praise. At a time when many of maturer years were found wanting in fortitude to make an open avowal of their faith, this youth boldly declared himself a Christian, and neither flattery nor blows could shake his constancy, though every art was practised to break his attachment to Christ. He was made the butt of the children of the town, was shunned by his relations, and at length banished from home, and disowned by his father, whose unnatural conduct was stimulated by the applause of his Pagan friends. These extraordinary circumstances attracted general attention towards Cyril, who was ere long informed against, and dragged before the governor, with a view, however, more to frighten than to punish him. child, I will pardon your faults," said the judge, "your father will take you home again, and you may still enjoy the prospect of inheriting the fortune of your family, if you will only take a kind and prudent advice." Cyril remained unmoved. "I care not for an earthly house or worldly riches; I have a nobler mansion, and treasures that will never fade, in heaven. I don't fear death, which will bring me to that better state." After this bold reply, the judge publicly commanded him to be bound, as if to be carried to immediate execution, but gave secret instructions to his attendants to content themselves with simply terrify-

ing him by the sight of the apparatus of death. The officers on their return reported that the young Christian never shed a tear, nor betrayed the least symptom of weakness at beholding the fire with which he was threatened. Whereupon the judge, still hoping to reclaim him, addressed him once more, "My child, you have seen what will be done to you if you continue with this impious sect. Be no longer foolish, return to the bosom of your family, and look forward to the fine fortune that is awaiting you." "Your intentions are kind," was the youth's reply; "but I have no fear of your tortures. I have already told you of the glorious inheritance in heaven, and your sentence of death I shall receive with pleasure, as it will send me to enjoy it." The bystanders were deeply affected by this extraordinary language from a child. But, turning round to them, he said, "You ought rather to rejoice with me, than make me an object of your compassion. You know not what place of glory and felicity I am going to." Farther attempts at remonstrance would have been fruitless. The doom of the young martyr was scaled; and his death, which took place upon the spot, was marked by the same Christian heroism he had displayed all along.

About the year 260, there were in Antioch two young men, known by the respective names of Sapricius and Nicephorus, who, though not related, were, from the long habits of intimacy which their families had maintained with each other, associated by the closest terms of intercourse from their earliest years. The companionship of their schoolboy days ripened at length, into the friendship of manhood; both of them were Christians, and although when they grew up they chose different professions in life,—Sapricius entering into the service of the Church, while Nicephorus followed a lucrative branch of trade,—yet so much were they attached to one another, that all their spare moments were spent in each other's society,

and they seemed to realize the beau ideal, the perfection of pure and real friendship, that of having the same sentiments, the same tastes, the same habits in common. A friendship of such long continuance, and which, moreover, had survived many severe trials, was the admiration of the whole city, and the intimacy of Sapricius and Nicephorus became as proverbial among the people of Antioch in those latter times as any of the romantic attachments which the classical poets have described in an early and fabulous age. But, alas! friendship, like every thing else in this world, often hangs by a frail and uncertain tenure, and the experience of all ages has proven that

A word, a look, unkindly given,
Ah! hearts that long in love were sealed,
A word, a look, has rudely riven.

This, at least, was the case with Sapricius and Nicephorus. Some slight offence, on the part of the latter, threw the apple of discord between the two friends; and from secret heart-burning and smothered suspicions, the contention grew at length so hot, that they entirely suspended their intercourse, and for years were accustomed to pass each other on the streets. At length, however, the heart of Nicephorus began to relent; he was ashamed and humbled on account of the sin of such intemperate and unworthy behaviour; and, either feeling himself to be, or generously consenting to be thought the original offender, he solicited the kind offices of some mutual friends to bring about a reconciliation with Sapricius. Meeting after meeting was held by these warm-hearted and Christian individuals with the view of adjusting the differences between the two friends, and in spite of many discouragements and obstacles, that seemed to rise at every step of their negotiations, they persevered, till at length finding all their efforts fruitless, they gave up the task in despair. The spirit of Christian forgiveness and love had, however, so strongly returned to the bosom of Nicephorus, that he would not rest nor leave a stone unturned till he saw the countenance of his friend reconciled; and with that view he determined on going in person to the house of Sapricius, threw himself at his feet, and begged forgiveness. But no advances could move, no humiliation relent, the mind of his adversary. Neither the recollection of their former attachment, nor a regard to the honour of his own sacred calling, nor the soft influence of Christian love, could melt his heart of stone; and, with an assumption of the most stern and intolerable pride, he drove his Christian

brother away from his door.

Matters continued for a long time in this painful state between the two friends; and no opportunity of renewing the attempts at reconciliation occurred, till the emperor Valerian fulminated the thunders of persecution against the Christians. Antioch, then and long celebrated as the cradle and stronghold of the Christian name, was the chief scene where the imperial vengeance alighted; and among the first, if not the very first in the city that was seized, was Sapricius,—his public character and active zeal procuring him the honour of being made an example. At the tribunal of the prætor, he maintained so unyielding a deportment, and to all interrogatories gave so unhesitatingly the brief and unvarying answer, "I am a Christian," that his trial was a short process; and his judge looking upon him as "obstinate in a pestilent superstition," ordered him forthwith to be executed at the usual place without the gates. The fatal tidings, borne on the wings of fame, soon reached the ears of Nicephorus, who rushed out to meet the procession; not, however, from idle curiosity, but from a strong wish to receive from the dying martyr a token of peace; and the moment the confessor came within hearing, he exclaimed, "Martyr of Christ, forgive

me, if in any thing I have sinned against thee!" Sapricius, turning round, and finding the voice to proceed from Nicephorus, marched on in sullen silence. Not discouraged by the failure of his first attempt, the eager Nicephorus ran forward to the end of another street, and made the same imploring request; while the soldiers pushed him aside, and laughed at him as a fool, who put himself to the trouble of begging forgiveness of a man who, in a few moments, would be no more. In this strain he continued till the procession reached the place of execution, when, resolved on one last and desperate effort, he pushed forward to the middle of the crowd, and placing himself full in front of the martyr, made an appeal which he hoped would reach his heart. But he spoke not now of their ancient friendship. He besought him, by the tears and agonies of the cross, by the blood which was shed for sinners, by the dread tribunal before which he was soon to appear, to extend to him the hand of a brother, and forgive him, even as God, for Christ's sake, had forgiven them. But not even these solemn considerations, addressed to him in such an awful moment, could make the obdurate heart of Sapricius respond "to pity's gentle touch." He remained like the deaf adder; and this hard impenitent state of mind soon produced its natural effects; for, as he had resisted the spirit of Christian love, the Spirit of Christian grace abandoned him. He felt all his native weakness; and, in a moment, while the executioner was applying the torch to kindle the pile that was to consume him, he exclaimed, "Kill me not; I am ready to obey the orders of the emperor, and to sacrifice to the gods!" To the heathen bystanders, this recantation, at the eleventh hour, was probably not at all surprising; as they looked upon it as naturally resulting from the weakness of human nature, shrinking from suffering and death. But to Nicephorus it appeared in a far

different light. While he had seen, with deep and painful regret, that the heart of the martyr was strangely inaccessible to the voice of Christian love, he still hoped it might be secretly animated by the faith "that overcometh the world;" but by the last melancholy declaration of Sapricius, his charitable hopes were sadly dispelled, and in silent agony he stood amongst the crowd, weeping tears such as angels shed over the awful fall of a minister of Christ, "whose praise was in all the Churches." Recovering from his first astonishment, he made a strong effort to gain the ear of this lapsing brother, and in accents which poured forth the very soul of Christian affection, reminded him that whoever denies Christ before men, him shall the Lord deny before his Father and the holy angels, urged him not to give cause to the enemies of truth to triumph and blaspheme, and besought him not to lose that crown of glory which through a long series of trials, he was on the eve of obtaining. But the mind of the apostate was now a stranger to the hope, not less than to the love of Christ; and the pious layman having made these earnest but unavailing efforts, to induce the priest to set an example of faith in the Saviour, came forward to the officers, and exclaimed, "I am a Christian; I believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom that person has denied. Let me die in his place!" The officers, on hearing this unexpected announcement, were thrown into a new difficulty. zeal they might feel to rid the world of all who professed the religion of Jesus, they had no power to execute without the authority of a magistrate, and therefore despatched a messenger to the prætor to inform him that Sapricius had promised to sacrifice to the gods, but that one of the bystanders had vociferously announced himself a Christian, and importuned them to lead him to execution. The prætor, on hearing this intelligence, gave orders accordingly, and

Nicephorus died a firm and triumphant martyr, while his former friend returned to Antioch a degraded and

despised apostate.

Romanus, a deacon of Cæsarea, suffered at Antioch in the beginning of Diocletian's persecution, when the imperial vengeance was directed chiefly against the leaders of the Church. Happening to come upon business to that city at a time when the Pagan inhabitants, with the magistrates at their head, were demolishing the Christian Churches, which abounded in great numbers there, his indignation was roused by witnessing the sacrilegious outrage; and, more especially, when he met with a crowd of men, women, and children, who were lately Christians, on their way to a heathen temple to sacrifice, he could restrain his feelings no longer, and loudly upbraided them for their cowardice and perfidy. The boldness of the stranger roused the resentment of their military escort, who, seizing Romanus, dragged him to the tribunal, and were the indirect occasion of exhibiting in Antioch, amidst the lamentably general defection of the resident disciples, one noble example, at least, of the power of faith and the excellence of Christianity. Without demanding any more proof of his guilt than the report of the officers, the governor condemned him to expiate his offence on the funeral pile. was a sudden turn of affairs, and one which, in the circumstances of Romanus, who was at a distance from his family and home, would have crushed the spirit of a less stedfast Christian, and made him repent, and perhaps apologize, for his rash and imprudent behaviour. But though in a strange city, without friends or acquaintances to cheer and support him by their sympathy and conversation, the courage of this high-minded man never forsook him; and, remembering that the honour of Christ, as well as the success of His cause, were deeply concerned in his constancy, he continued, during the whole interval

that was allowed him after his doom was sealed, to testify to the bystanders the Gospel of the grace of God. An official having stepped forward to tie his hands behind his back, Romanus readily presented himself, and inquired smilingly, "Where is the fire that is to consume me?" Galerius was himself on the spot, and that imperial monster, enraged at the firm and cheerful tone with which the remark was made, ordered his tongue to be cut out. A surgeon, one of the fallen Christians, whose base conduct had called forth the reproaches of the deacon, having been observed skulking among the crowd, had the mortifying duty imposed on him of performing the crucl operation. And no sooner was it over than Galerius, maddened like a tiger, and resolved on gratifying his vindictive mind with protracting the sufferings of his victim, remanded him, in his mutilated state, to a dark and cold prison, where, as the climax of punishment, his legs were unnaturally distended in the stocks, by being put in the fifth hole. In that painful position he continued for several days, and was at length strangled.

Euplius, a deacon, lived in Sicily, and suffered in the year 304, because he could not be prevailed upon to give up the Scriptures. At that time the heathen magistrates had just made the discovery that the Christians derived all their religious notions from a written book, and conceiving that, could they succeed in extirpating that sacred volume, the cause of Christ would sink much more rapidly and certainly than by taking the lives of his disciples, as it would destroy the means of rearing any succeeding race of Christians, they directed their utmost efforts, in the first instance, to search for the Scriptures,—to find out those who were in possession of that secret treasure, and then, by bribery or threats, to get it into their own hands. Among a multitude of others who were brought to trial on this account, we select the single

instance of this Sicilian deacon, whose zeal and diligence in reading the Scriptures to his neighbours at length drew upon him the vengeance of Diocletian's emissaries. On the 12th of August, in the city of Catania, where he resided, he was summoned to the presence of the governor, and he immediately obeyed, entering the council-room with his copy of the Scriptures in his hand. Being interrogated why he kept those parchments contrary to the will of the emperors, and where he got them? he replied, "That they had been seized in his house, and that he daily read them, for in them were contained the words of eternal life." Being requested to read a few passages, he opened at random, and read-" Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and, in another passage,-" Whosoever will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." While he was reading, the magistrate asked him the import of the mystic words. Euplius replied, "They refer to the pure and divine law, which we are commanded to obey." "By whom are you commanded?" "By Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God." These answers affording the strongest proofs of his attachment to the Gospel, were followed by a stern command to deliver up the forbidden book, under the severest penalties of the rack. A day and a night were allowed Euplius to deliberate whether he would submit to the torture or part with his Bible. But the stedfast Christian resolved rather to die than surrender to the flames a book which contained all he held dearest in the world; and having, on his examination the following day, avowed that determination, he was handed over to the executioners, who received orders, on every successive refusal to give up the Scriptures, to increase the severity of the torment. But the constancy of Euplius was invincible; amid his protracted sufferings not a murmur escaped, and nothing was heard but the exclamation, which he

continued frequently to repeat—"Christ, strengthen me,—it is for thy name I am suffering this." At length, the governor, considering him as an irreclaimable Christian, pronounced his sentence, ordering him to be beheaded for having despised the edicts of the emperors, and blasphemed the gods. The lictors forthwith led him away, with his Bible tied round his neck,—one of them, during the march to the place of execution, crying out every now and then to the crowd, "This is Euplius, the enemy of the gods and the emperors,"—and there they struck off the head of the martyr, who, with his dying breath, gave thanks to God that he was counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.*

Maximus was a petty merchant, who, in pursuit of his peaceful occupation, had come from a neighbouring village to Ephesus, and busily employed himself during his temporary sojourn in the great city, in purchasing the various articles of merchandize he intended to carry back with him to his place of business. The simple transactions of a country shopkeeper could easily have been despatched without introducing the subject of religion,-and Maximus was too prudent a man to provoke discussion upon a subject on which he entertained sentiments entirely at variance with the vast majority of the inhabitants of Ephesus. But the feelings of the people in that city were then highly excited about religious matters. The reputation of their town, as well as the existence of almost every family residing in it, was more or less bound up with the continued glory of "the great goddess Diana;" and, as they clearly saw that the services of idolatry, and the numerous trades that were subservient to it, would soon be at an end unless some effectual means were adopted to prevent conversions to Christianity, they kept a jealous eye on all strangers who entered their city, lest they might have come to sow the seeds

^{*} Fleury ii. 470.

of the new doctrine, and practised a great many secret arts to discover their religious bias. It was by some base and disingenuous means of that kind, used to betray the feelings of Maximus, that the religion of that plain and inoffensive countryman was detected. Information was immediately lodged against him by the persons with whom he had been lately engaged in amicable traffic; and, just as he was preparing to leave Ephesus, on his return homewards, he was dragged to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, and interrogated as to his being guilty of the heinous crime of being a Christian. Dissembling was abhorrent to the character of the man, and having, therefore, made a frank admission that he had embraced the religion of Christ, he was suspended on that dreadful engine of torture, the horse, and afterwards, notwithstanding the weakening effects of this instrument, by which his whole body was racked, was subjected to a variety of other inflictions, from the recital of which humanity revolts. But neither the scourge, nor the iron hooks, nor the fire, could terrify him into a denial of his Lord; and, at last, the governor pronounced the sentence, that Maximus, for refusing to sacrifice to the great goddess Diana, be stoned to death. He was, accordingly, carried by the lictors without the walls of Ephesus, and his sufferings immediately terminated by a shower of stones.

In the year 304, Irenæus, whose great merits raised him at an early age to high reputation and influence in the Church, was apprehended, and subjected to tortures of no ordinary severity, hopes being entertained that, if he could be prevailed on to apostatize, the fall of so influential a character would be followed by the return of many of his people to the worship of the temples. To insure a result so eagerly wished for, the governor and his friends in the priesthood, who were the secret instigators of the barbarous proceedings, resolved to assail Irenæus when his mind would

be weakened by his bodily sufferings, in a way the most overpowering to the sensibilities of nature. Being a man scarcely arrived at the prime of life,-his parents were alive,—he was married and had a family. During a severe paroxysm, occasioned by the rack, his father and mother were introduced at one side, and his little children at the other, who, seeing their beloved relative in such an agony of distress, began with entreaties and tears to implore him to take pity, the one, on their gray hairs—the other, on their helpless infancy. Then his most intimate friends and neighbours were brought in to press on him the propriety of considering the dependent state of his family; and last of all, his wife, to whom he was most ardently attached, made her appearance, almost frantic with grief, and plied him with every familiar and conjugal endearment to consent but to throw a little incense on the altar, and then he would be restored to the comforts of his home and the bosom of his family. To these united remonstrances, Irenæus remaining inflexible, was again thrown into prison, where he lay for a long time enduring privations scarcely less trying than the torture he had formerly experienced at his trial. At length he was brought out for a second examination. Having declared that he was still immovable in his attachment to Christ, the judge, thinking to touch him in a tender point, reminded him of the ties of nature which should bind him to life. " Have you a father and mother?" asked the judge. "No," was the reply. "Have you a wife?" "No." "Have you children?" "No." "Who, then, were those who visited you when last here?" "I know no one now according to the flesh, for our Lord Jesus Christ has said, 'He that loveth father, mother, wife, or children, more than me, is not worthy of me." "Sacrifice, at least for the sake of your children." "The same Lord and Saviour who saveth me will save my children if they know him," was the firm

reply of the martyr. Concluding it to be fruitless to employ any farther attempts to shake the constancy of a man of such a stamp, the judge pronounced sentence that Irenæus should be beheaded.*

In the same year, Philip, bishop of Heraclia, gave an admirable example of the power of faith. When the persecution burst like a thunder-cloud on Heraclia, he was strongly advised by his friends to withdraw, but deeming it his duty to encourage, by his presence and his counsels, the flock under his charge, at so critical a period, he threw out of sight all consideration of his personal safety, and went from day to day among his people, exhorting them to be stedfast and immovable. By order of the emperor, all Christian churches were to be demolished, or, at least, sealed up, and all assemblies for their worship strictly prohibited; and when the officers came and turned Philip and his congregation to the door, the undaunted minister, leaning his back to the wall, for he was bending under a load of eighty years, made an animated address to his brethren, and bade them not be cast down, when they remembered that the God whom they worshipped was not confined to temples made with hands. Being summoned before a magistrate to answer for his conduct in disobeying the imperial edict, he was commanded, on pain of torture, to deliver up the vessels of silver or gold that belonged to his church, and all the copies of Scripture he had in his possession. He replied that, although he had no fears of torture, he would hand over to them the sacred utensils, for God was worshipped not with metal, but with reverence and godly fear; but that neither bribes nor menaces would induce him to part with the Word of God. A blow on the mouth was the reward of this resolute declaration; and while he was wiping off, with silent resignation, the stream of blood that issued from the wound, Hermes, one of his deacons,

exclaimed, that it was of no use to burn the Scriptures, for the truth could never be rooted out, and posterity would, for the memory of their fathers, and for the good of their own souls, multiply the divine Word more than ever. Such boldness was not allowed to escape with impunity. Hermes was scourged severely, and ordered, without delay, to go to the place where the sacred vessels were kept, and deliver them to the hands of the officer. That was the signal for a general pillage of the churches. The roofs were dismantled, the furniture broken to pieces, and every copy of the Scriptures they fell in with was committed to the flames. None of these tumultuous outrages, however, could daunt the spirit of Philip, who, along with his excellent deacon, spurned at all proposals to consult their safety by sacrificing. They were then remanded to prison; and, while they lay in confinement, the reigning governor was superseded, and another appointed to his place, of a disposition more inveterately hostile than his predecessor to the religion of Jesus. One of the first measures of his government was, to bring the Christians in prison to punishment; and, to strike terror into all the rest, he ordered Philip to be dragged by the feet through the city, after which, the body of this steady Christian, soiled with dust, and lacerated by the sharp stones, was thrown into a furnace and consumed.

In the year 309, twelve persons suffered martyrdom in Cæsarea, whose extraordinary faith and constancy during their trial, and at the scene of execution, produced a deep sensation among the people of that place. Without detailing the conduct of the rest, though it was truly admirable, we confine this notice to a few incidents connected with Pamphilus, who was the chief of them, and a presbyter in the Church of that town,—a man who, to the most profound humility, universal benevolence, indefatigable activity in every good work, and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures,

added the rare attribute of a truly accomplished and philosophic mind, and who altogether, according to the testimony of Eusebius, his friend, was a noble exemplar of every Christian virtue. But neither his eminent learning nor his far-famed benevolence could atone, in that period of violence, for the crime of being a Christian; and, accordingly, he and other eminent Christians from the town and the neighbourhood of Cæsarea, were summoned to the tribunal, interrogated in succession as to their adoption of the Christian worship, and, after being subjected to a variety of tortures to make them renounce it, sentenced to be beheaded. The moment the fatal sentence was pronounced, Porphyry, a young slave of the household of Pamphilus, and well instructed, as might have been expected in such a Christian family, in the knowledge and belief of the truth, impelled by the strong affection he bore for his master, pressed through the crowd of spectators that were present at the trial, and implored Firmilian in the most earnest manner that the bodies might be allowed the decencies of burial,-a privilege frequently denied at that time to the Christians. That magistrate, instead of being struck with admiration of this dutiful and affectionate conduct in a slave, flew into a violent rage on account of the intrusion, and, having ordered the condemned Christians to be removed to prison, placed Porphyry, as a prisoner, in the very bar which had just been occupied by his master. The usual question-"Art thou a Christian?" having been asked, and answered in the affirmative, the slave-confessor was delivered to the lictors with peremptory instructions to put him to the severest torture, until he should consent to sacrifice. During the whole of that dreadful ordeal Porphyry did not utter a word, nor allow a groan to escape him; and Firmilian perceiving that the time of the court was occupied to no purpose, in trying to break the invincible resolution of this slave, resolved to get quit of

him; and condemned him, without delay, to be put to death over a slow fire. Notwithstanding the severe racking to which almost every part of his body had been subjected, he walked on his own feet to the place where the fire was kindled, retaining unruffled tranquillity and even cheerfulness, and after giving many strong demonstrations of the power of his faith, he was choked by the flames,-the last words he was heard to utter being, "Jesus, thou Son of God, support me." Seleucus was a witness of the affecting scene; and as soon as all was over, he hastened to the prison to try, if possible, to obtain an opportunity of refreshing his friend, Pamphilus, with tidings of the triumphant departure of his young slave. He had reached the outer court of the prison, where he found some of the confessors sitting, and was in the act of giving the usual salutation of a kiss to one of them, when the sentinel, turning round, perceived him, and knowing it to be a token of recognition among Christians, immediately laid hold of the unguarded visitor, and informed against him as an enemy of the gods. Seleucus was personally known to the guard, having formerly been a soldier, where his athletic form, and perfect symmetry, and beauty of person, had been the admiration of the whole army; and he had, moreover, on several occasions, signalized himself by his bold and heroic achievements, so as to have attained some of the highest honours the Romans awarded to successful valour. On becoming a Christian, however, he resigned his commission, and from that moment dedicated his time and his fortune to charity and doing all manner of good. His withdrawal from the army, which had taken place in a brief interval of tranquillity, had, though he escaped bodily pains and penalties, brought him into odium with his former comrades, and, though of an old date, was now brought against him as aggravating his offence in becoming a Christian. The sentence of death was pronounced against him,

р d

and he who had hastily run to the prison to apprise Pamphilus of the admirable conduct of his slave, was brought into the presence of the friend he sought in a manner he little expected, as a doomed companion of

his martyrdom.*

In the year 310, Felix, pastor of a small town in Italy, and universally respected and beloved by all, heathens as well as Christians, in his neighbourhood, was apprehended, and cast into prison, on a charge of being a leader in the secret conspiracy the Christians were meditating, with a view to subvert the constitution of the empire. In a dark and unwholesome dungeon he was loaded with chains, and deprived of a chair to sit, or a bed to lie upon, except the bare earth, which, moreover, to increase his discomfort, was strewed with innumerable small fragments of pottery, sharp as glass, so that he could not get any repose. From this dismal confinement, however, he found means of escape, and fleeing to the mountains, took refuge sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, till he at length arrived at a lonely cottage, where a kind-hearted heathen woman, perceiving him to be one of the persecuted Christians, kept him concealed in an out-house. In that sanctuary he had continued for several weeks, when the soldiers that were sent in every direction to scour the country, approached, and while they were in the act of searching her house, the prudent housewife found means of apprising Felix of his danger, and directed him to an old dry well in a neighbouring field, which was That being considered a place of covered at the top. greater security than the cottage, he continued there, being daily supplied with bread and other victuals, which the kind owner let down to him in a basket, and with drink from a deposit of rain-water which had collected into a small pool in a hollow of the pit. For several months he inhabited that subterraneau

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiquities.

abode, where, although banished from the cheerful society of men, he enjoyed many precious seasons of blissful communion with his God and Saviour; and, at length, on the restoration of peace to the Church, he returned to the scene of his pastoral labours as a man restored from the dead.*

From the melancholy abundance of materials in the history of the primitive age, it were an easy task to swell these notices of martyrs, and to adduce many other examples of Christians, in every rank and condition of life,-young converts, no less than veteran disciples of threescore and ten, who exhibited a purity of faith, and a constancy in suffering, not inferior to the noble testimony borne by any of those to whom we have assigned the first and brightest place among the cloud of witnesses. Nor, we are persuaded, would the reader feel it to be either an uninteresting or unprofitable occupation, to tarry a little longer over the memorials of those ancient believers, who, in times of no common difficulty, and among a people wholly given to idolatry, upheld, at the hazard of all that was dear to them, the honour and worship of the one living and true God. Cold, indeed, and insensible to every feeling of moral excellence, must be his heart who can trace with indifference the actings of men, whose character presents more excellent traits of humanity, and whose story carries with it the charm of a deeper interest, than that of any to be found in the whole compass of ancient history. Little must his mind feel of love to the name, or of interest in the cause of the Saviour, whose bosom does not glow with generous sympathy and unbounded admiration for those faithful champions of His cause, who cheerfully took the spoiling of their goods, and were willing to make the costly sacrifice of life itself, rather than swerve from their principles. If heroic fortitude, invincible energy, and constancy firm as a rock, call

^{*} Fleury, ii.

forth commendation and praise,-never were those qualities displayed in a nobler manner, than by the martyrs of the primitive age, whose faithfulness unto death casts the boasted heroism of a Mutius and a Regulus completely into the shade, and whose deportment in circumstances the most trying to frail humanity, was as much superior to the constancy of those celebrated Romans, as the cause in which they suffered was higher and holier than patriot ever bled or hero fought for. But to admire is much more easy than to imitate, and the right and only valuable improvement of these records of the martyrs is not the bestowing upon their memory the tribute of a barren admiration, but to endeavour to catch a kindred spirit, and in the cause, which, in common with them, we have chosen as the cause of truth and righteousness, be prepared, should Providence place us in similar circumstances, to exhibit as stedfast a faith—to bear as noble a testimony.

Their blood was shed In confirmation of the noblest claim—Our claim to feed upon immortal truth, To walk with God, to be divinely free, To soar, and to anticipate the skies. Yet few remember them. They lived unknown, Till persecution dragged them into fame, And chased them up to heaven. Their ashes flew No marble tells us whither; with their names No bard embalms and sanctifies his song; And history, so warm on meaner themes, Is cold on this. She execrates, indeed, The tyranny that doomed them to the fire, But gives the glorious sufferers little praise.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRIALS CONTINUED.

SOURCES OF STEDFASTNESS IN MARTYRS—STORY OF A PHRYGIAN APOSTATE

--LOVE OF CHRIST—FIRM HOPE OF IMMEDIATE ENTRANCE INTO HEAVEN—EFFECTS OF THE COURAGE AND CHRISTIAN VIRTUES OF THE
MARTYRS UPON MANY BEHOLDERS—INFORMER AGAINST THE APOSTLE
JAMES—JUSTIN MARTYR—BESAS, A SOLDIER—GESENIUS, AN ACTOR—
TREATMENT OF THOSE WHO FELL—CERTIFICATES OF MARTYRS—CELERINUS—CERTIFICATES DISAPPROVED OF—GREAT VALUE ATTACHED TO
MARTYRDOM—CONCLUDING REMARKS.

THE well-known saying of Erasmus, that "God had not given him the spirit of martyrdom," expresses more truly than that eminent man perhaps intended or believed the real origin of the fortitude that enabled the martyrs to be faithful unto death. Nature instinctively recoils from suffering; and if, in some cases, by stern resolution or enthusiastic excitement, its courage and resolution is wound up to an unusual pitch, and a disposition is felt as if capable of braving the last extremities,—the near approach or the actual presence of danger has often betrayed the inherent weakness of humanity, and exhibited humbling proofs, how soon the strongest nerves may be overcome, the firmest purposes be shaken, and those who were heroes at a distance, become cowards when brought to the test. The primitive age of the Church was not without many examples of ill-informed and self-confident Christians, who, when trouble and persecution arose, were offended, and fell away. Quintus, a Phrygian,

for example, who possessed all the ardent and enthusiastic feelings characteristic of his countrymen, embraced the Gospel, and, by the uncommon fervour of his zeal, and his devoted attention to all the outward departments of religion, acquired the reputation of an eminent Christian. During the persecution of Diocletian, he took every opportunity of proclaiming himself a follower of Christ; and even in the presence of the judge, before whom he was summoned on account of his religion, exhibited an air of courageous defiance that seemed to smile on torture and death. Nay, even during the procession to the amphitheatre, he maintained the appearance of the same inflexible courage, till, all at once, on coming in sight of the wild beasts, his courage gave way,—he trembled like an aspen leaf,—and he exclaimed, "I am willing to sacrifice."* The failure of this poor Phrygian is just what might have been expected in an individual whose courage was nothing more than a violent effort of enthusiasm and temporary excitement. And, indeed, it must be evident, that men who could voluntarily encounter such painful trials as the primitive martyrs were exposed to, and, for twenty-four or forty-eight hours together remain under the rack without the least faltering, must have derived their courage from another source,—the inspiration of higher principles than those of their own weak and feeble nature. "We will not," to use the words of a respectable writer, "compare the courage of the martyr to that of the soldier. It is one thing to stand in the ranks of war, where there are many chances of escaping without a wound, and where the mind is so much occupied with the part which the soldier has to perform, that it has no leisure for cool or deliberate reflection either about living or dying, and another thing to mark the slow steady march of death, especially when he is appearing in a form the most terrific that the genius of cruelty and injustice can

^{*} Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. i.

invent. Though the death of the soldier might secure the victory to his country, very few would be inclined to show that they had as much of the patriot and the soldier in their disposition as to be willing to make the sacrifice. But when matters came to that issue with the martyrs, that it behoved them either to seal their testimony with their blood, or renounce it, their souls chose strangling and blood rather than life upon dishonourable terms."

Nor was this heroic resolution confined only to a few who were made of "sterner stuff"-men of strong and unbending characters, who had disciplined their minds to independence of thought, and who scorned to be found capable of abandoning their opinions from the mean and servile dread of bodily pains. ranks of the martyrs were found persons of every condition, and age, and sex: women of soft and delicate natures, who would have shrunk from public gaze,much more from exposure to the indignities they suffered; old men, tottering under the load of age, and boys and girls of tender years, whose imaginations might have been supposed to be dazzled and overcome by the ensigns of office and the majesty of judicial power,-all of whom, when reduced to the painful alternative of parting with their religion or their life, displayed an energy of purpose, an unshaken fortitude, that struck the beholders with amazment. Firmly believing, that in their adherence to the cause of Christ interests of unspeakable importance to their wellbeing were involved, in the loss of which liberty and life would have been purchased at too dear a rate, they hesitated not to throw the die that was to deprive them of those inestimable possessions, and, tearing themselves asunder from every inferior consideration, proclaimed their connection with the cause of Christ, whatever might betide. In vain did relatives and friends throw themselves at their feet, and importune them with tears to remember the tender ties that should

bind them to the world; -in vain did the judges often set before them bright prospects of wealth and honour to bribe them to return to idolatry; -in vain did tyranny assume its darkest frowns, and menace them with the utmost severities. Proof equally against the melting tears of friends and the fellest rage of their enemies, they continued firm as a rock in their attachment to the Gospel, and encountered the fate that awaited them with a constancy seldom equalled, never surpassed, in any other cause. And what was the principle from which this extraordinary fortitude arose? It was not the vain-glorious desire of gaining the reward of human applause,—for many of them met their fate in the solitude of the rack-chamber, and in the darkness of the prison, where there was no eye to witness their sacrifice, or meet them with the gaze of admiration. It was not the contagion of sympathy,the delirium of some frenzied feeling, which had strangely come over the minds of men,-for some of them were men of calm and contemplative habits, the farthest removed from the intoxication of passing enthusiasm; and multitudes there were, of different ranks, and in different countries, who had never been in contact with each other, and who were influenced by the most opposite habits of feeling and acting. It was nothing but the force of truth, urging them, at all hazards to their temporal concerns, to separate themselves from the ruinous errors of superstition, and operating on minds in which the love of the Saviour, and the sure and certain hope, through his merits, of an immediate immortality of bliss, had become paramount to every other affection. It was this alone which enabled them to persevere, where every lower principle would have suffered nature to misgive, and which made the tender stripling, the retiring female, the veteran saint, strong in the midst of weakness, vigorous in spirit while the body was feeble, serene amidst alarms, tranquil in the hour of danger, bold

and resolute in the prospect of death. What else but this could have made them willing to sever the most endearing ties, -could have led mothers to encourage their children—children their parents—husbands their wives—brothers their sisters—men their dearest friends —to bear every severity rather than depart from the faith and hope of the Gospel? What else but this made them all stedfast amid the heavings of expiring nature, and deprived the king of terrors of all his formidable power? Nay, not only were they stedfast and immovable, but they gave tokens of joy unspeakable, that they were counted worthy to suffer for their Master's name. In their hearts the sense of obligation to Him who had bought them with His blood, and sanctified them by His Spirit, was so strong, that they looked upon themselves as lying under a debt of gratitude which no services nor sufferings of theirs could ever discharge; and they hailed it as a privilege and an honour that they had an opportunity of testifying, in so decided a manner, the value they attached to that love of Christ, from which neither death nor the grave could separate them. With His love shed abroad in their hearts, and anticipating an immediate and everlasting union with Him in heaven, many of them not only endured as seeing God who is invisible, but triumphed gloriously over the infirmities of nature, seemed insensible to pain, and, as it were, transported out of themselves. Sometimes they animated one another with the assurance, that, in a few hours, they who were suffering together would be glorified together. At other times they gave thanks aloud, that though they were weak themselves through the flesh, they felt that they could bear all things through Christ in them and strengthening them. They received such liberal communications of grace, and so fully was the promise fulfilled to them, that as their day was so their strength should be, that it seemed not they who suffered, but Christ who suffered in them. His

word, which dwelt in them richly, became more precious than ever from the divine support and comfort it gave them in the hour of their trial; so that, though deprived of all assistance from man, they felt the promises they clung to to be spirit and truth,—making, while their afflictions abounded, their consolations much more to abound, and enabling them not only to be patient, but to glory in tribulation, and exult amid the blaze of the faggot and the gloom of the grave, as if they were already treading the confines of heaven, and breathing

the air of immortality.

The manner in which the martyrs met their death often produced effects diametrically opposite to those anticipated by the authors of the persecution. During the greater part of the first three centuries, the bigotry and intense hatred of the heathen to the religion of Jesus, thought of no other means of arresting the progress of that obnoxious cause, but extirpating it by measures of sanguinary ferocity, rarely, if ever, equalled in any other period of history; and yet every year's experience showed the folly of persecution, and should have convinced the rulers of the Roman world, that these barbarous proceedings were altogether ineffectual in checking the growth of the new faith. The tyrannical edicts that from time to time were fulminated from the courts of Rome and Nicomedia—the fires that were kindled in every part of the world—the strange and unheard-of engines of punishment, which a refined cruelty invented for the disciples of the "pestilent superstition," served only to extend the opinions which they were employed to crush, and to add fuel to the fervid zeal that already burned in the bosoms of the Christians. by the strongest convictions that the cause they had espoused was the cause of God and truth, and that a sincere and stedfast attachment to it would be followed by the enjoyment of eternal life, that people looked upon death with longing desire rather than with fear and trembling, and displayed, amid sufferings which humanity shudders to relate, a degree of patient and resolute endurance, which, awakening the sentiments of pity and admiration in the breasts of the beholders, were the means of bringing a vast accession to the ranks of the believers. Men felt it impossible to witness the executions which from day to day took place -attended with circumstances of more than ordinary severity, without reflecting on the character and views of those whom no terrors could daunt, nor misfortunes subdue; and while they saw great numbers of their fellow-creatures tortured and maltreated, far worse than the most atrocious criminals who trampled on the laws of society, for no other offence than their adoption of a certain form of worship, and attachment to some peculiar opinions on the subject of religion, they were naturally led to contrast the temper of the heathen oppressors with that of the believers. pity they felt for the situation of the poor sufferers, was soon mingled with suspicion and abhorrence of the religion which required and sanctioned such means of defence; and when they beheld the silent but grave and dignified demeanour of the confessors of Christ, walking to the fire that was to consume, or the wild beasts that were to devour them, -not with the abject and prostrate spirit of felons, convinced that they were receiving the just reward of their deeds, but with the calm serenity and firm step of men, conscious that truth and justice were on their side—when they witnessed the meekness and patience that shone with ineffable grace on the countenances of the dying men, and heard them, in sounds so novel and strange to pagan ears, praying for the judge who condemned them, for the emperor who authorised the persecution, for the executioner who was to be the agent of their punishment, and the infuriated rabble who were driving them with execrations from the world; and beseeching the Almighty that their own death might not

be remembered among the sins laid to their enemies' charge, many of the bystanders were moved to tears, and were led, in spite of themselves, to conclude that it was not for slight and trivial reasons that multitudes of reasonable creatures would forego all the advantages of life, and brave even the infliction of torture and death; that such marvellous constancy and fortitude could be produced only by the inspiration of truth, and be allied with characters of pure and high-toned virture. Thus it was, that the Christian blood that was shed was like seed sown in the earth. It sprang from the ground again, producing a more vigorous and luxuriant crop than before; and the severities exercised against the believers were in reality the means of confirming old disciples more strongly in the faith.

Many of the primitive Christians traced their conversion to attendance on such spectacles, and the admiration produced on their minds by the behaviour of the martyrs at their trial and execution. The soldier who guarded James, the first of the apostles that suffered martyrdom in his Master's cause,-having fallen a victim to the unprincipled ambition of Herod Agrippa, was so struck with the heavenly character and conversation of the prisoner he was appointed to watch, that through one of those sudden and extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit, that frequently occurred in primitive times, he became a partaker at the same time both of the joys and sufferings of the ambassador of Christ. Having found joy and peace in believing, he made a public declaration of his change of mind, and though he well knew the dreadful fate that awaited him, none of those things could move him away from the faith and hope of the Gospel. Clinging to the arms of the man, whom he had lately dragged with rude violence to the prison, but whom he now embraced and revered as his father, who had begotten him in the bonds of the Gospel, he BESAS. 425

walked in company with the apostle to the place of execution, and there, having given each other a solemn kiss of peace, they were beheaded together. * It was by the same means—the strong and irrefragable argument borne to the truth and excellence of the Christian faith by the behaviour of the martyrs—that Justin Martyr tells us he was led to abandon the principles of the Platonic philosophy for the doctrines of the Gospel. When he saw the Christians, whom he had always heard vilified as the worst and most flagitious of men, go to die with a bold and cheerful aspect, and declare their readiness to endure every species of barbarity that the malice of their enemies could inflict, rather than part with their religion, he reflected within himself that it was impossible such persons could be the slaves of sensuality and vice, which common fame represented them to be, as it was the interest of all the votaries of sinful pleasure to avoid death, and adopt every means of saving their lives; and thus he was brought to embrace the Gospel as the truth, and the grand means of forming the heart of man to the highest moral excellence. † Among the soldiers who guarded the martyrs in Egypt was one Besas, who signalized himself by checking the insolence of the multitude, and procuring respect for the suffering Christians. The fury of the mob was instantly directed against him, and it turned out that this amiable soldier had, by intercourse with the Christians, been led first to think favourably of, and then cordially to profess his faith in, the Gospel. On being taken before the governor, he declared that he valued his interest in Christ infinitely more than he did his life; and being, in consequence, doomed to share the fate of the prisoners he had been appointed to guard, he died, glorying to the last, in the firm hope of salvation. I Gesenius was a celebrated comic actor in the days of

^{*} Eusebius, chap. i. p. 9. † Apol., chap. i. p. 50. ‡ Hailes' Christian Antiquities, vol. ii. p. 16.

Diocletian, who gained great applause to himself by his exquisite mimicry both of the observances and the sufferings of Christians. At a time when some grand festivities were celebrating at the palace, this favourite player was commanded by his master to exhibit his celebrated performances in the theatre for the gratification of the royal visitors. In the hope of rendering his imitation more perfect, the player, whose nearest relations were Christians, addressed himself to the task of obtaining, through them, a more accurate knowledge of the forms of worship observed by the believers, and had also attended the trials and execution of several confessors, whose demeanour he intended to make the butt of his ridicule at the approaching exhibition before the court. The result, however, of his observations was a total change of mind; and he who had been watching the Christians for no other purpose than to make them the objects of his satire and buffoonery, became sincerely attached to the faith he was premeditating to abuse. When the appointed day arrived, and the illustrious party had repaired to the theatre in expectation of a rich entertainment, Gesenius was seen in white linen—the garment which all newly baptized persons were for a week,—and, as the actor was somewhat reluctant to show himself, some soldiers of the imperial guard, thinking he was hiding himself in sport, hurried him in their arms to the stage, where the actor, finding it impossible to escape, addressed his royal audience in the following terms:-"Oh! emperor, and people of this city, listen to what I am going to say. I never used to hear the Christians spoken of without horror, and I always had particular pleasure in making sport of all who continued to profess their connection with the name of Christ. despised my relations and kinsmen on account of their embracing Christianity, and carried my contempt of that religion so far as to seek information about its mysteries, for the sole purpose of diverting myself and

the public at the expense of its friends. But when, in acting a baptism, the water touched me, and I was about, after the manner of Christians, to reply-'I believe,' methought I saw a hand reaching down from heaven, and some shining angels above me, who read in a book all the sins I ever committed, blotted them out in the same water, and then showed me the book whiter than snow! Oh! mighty emperor, and you people who have been accustomed to ridicule these Christian mysteries, be persuaded with me henceforth to believe that Jesus Christ is the true God,—that he is light and truth, and that through him you may obtain pardon." The emperor, on hearing this speech, fell into a violent rage, and, after ordering Gesenius to be severely scourged upon the spot, committed him to one of his attendants to force him to sacrifice. He was put upon the rack, and treated with the most brutal cruelty; but he remained stedfast in the faith, and not a word did he allow to escape from his lips, except now and then an exclamation of bitter regret that he had so often dishonoured Christ and his faithful servants, and had been so late in believing. *-Many other instances there were of conversions made in circumstances similar to these. Frequently the gaolers, the guards, the executioners, and felons who were imprisoned in the same dungeons, were converted, and became partners in the sufferings of their believing fellow-prisoners. Frequently, while the soldiers and magistrates were heaping cruelties on the poor Christians, the populace, though they did not care about their religion, were so wrought upon by the savage conduct of the persecutors, and the meek and amiable temper of the martyrs, that they interfered for their rescue, and chased the magistrate from his tribunal with a shower of stones. † Still more frequently were many confessors themselves, who were sincerely attached to Christ, but whose timid and irresolute

^{*} Fleury, ii. 476.

[†] Fleury Mœurs des Chretiens, p. 265.

minds had faltered at sight of the engines of torture, reanimated by witnessing the faith and constancy of some eminent champions of the truth. "Through the patience of those who endured, the immeasurable compassion of Christ became manifest; for, by the living were the dead raised to life,—the martyrs obtained favour for those who were not martyrs,—encouraged by the unbending and joyful behaviour of their brethren, many of the apostates returned, were revived, and taught to confess the truth in Christ; and having their spirits braced again, they repaired to the judgment-seat to be once more questioned by the

governor." *

All, however, whose courage failed them in the hours of trial, were not thus happily revived. Many were prevailed upon to sacrifice, or to put forth their hand to some other act of idolatry, which implied an abjuration of Christ; and the Churches, after the restoration of tranquillity, found no cases of discipline more numerous, or requiring more delicate treatment, than those of the unhappy individuals, who, after a temporary apostasy, sought readmission into the bosom of the Church. Most of the leading Christians in those times having themselves been sufferers, knew, from their own sad experience, the terrible ordeal through which the believers were obliged to pass; and it generally happened, that those who had displayed the greatest fortitude and constancy themselves, were the foremost advocates for a charitable and indulgent consideration of the fall of their weaker brethren. Through their influence, the mild spirit of the Gospel triumphed over the tone of severity which some pastors were disposed to assume, and the Christians of the primitive age adopted a general uniformity of discipline, by which lapsed penitents might, after a prescribed period, be restored to communion with the body of the faithful. This term of probation varied

^{*} Martyrs of Lyons, p. 52.

according as the circumstances of the fall were more or less aggravating. Those who had sacrificed involuntarily, by having their hands forcibly plunged into a censer of incense, or their mouths filled with pieces of consecrated cake, while they lay insensible, or were too weak to resist through the violence of their sufferings, were restored at once on their application. Those who apostatized the moment they were brought into the presence of the judge, or in sight of the torture, those who, after making a bold and magnanimous avowal of their faith, afterwards gave way during their confinement in prison; and,—those who, after consenting to sacrifice under the paralyzing effects of their terror, afterwards recovered their fortitude, and, proclaiming themselves Christians, underwent the torture, had their property confiscated, or were banished, were admitted after a longer or shorter period, as the rules of the Church, in different places, prescribed for their several offences. A severer discipline was prepared for those who, to effect their escape, had practised any deception on the magistrates, by purchasing an indulgence, or by substituting their slaves to be tortured instead of themselves. If private members of the Church, they were subjected to the strictest surveillance, ere they regained their place in the society of the faithful; if pastors or deacons, they might be admitted to communion, though they were for ever incapable of holding any sacred office. But no class of these delinquents excited greater abhorrence, or were treated with more rigour, than the Traditores,—those who had surrendered their copies of the Scripture to be burned. Some apology might be admitted for the weakness of humanity in those who shrunk from bodily sufferings, when threatened with the loss of their eyes, the dislocation of their limbs, or the painful distention of their whole frames. Some leniency might be shown to those who were induced, in trying circumstances, to take into their 430 TRIALS.

hands a few grains of incense, to bow to an image, or to eat a piece of salted cake that had been offered on the altar. But to part with the Word, which had been written by the finger of apostles and prophets, dictated by the Holy Spirit, and which alone contained the records of eternal truth, was considered a crime of the most heinous nature, which no apprehension of danger could palliate, and the commission of which required to be visited with the heaviest censures of the Church. Accordingly, there was no part of their conduct the lapsed were more anxious to conceal, as those convicted of this guilt were excluded from the Church for 10, 20, sometimes 30 years; many were not received till their dying hour; and on several, who regained not only the private communion of the Church, but the enjoyment of their sacred office, suspicion of having perpetrated this act of sacrilege fell, which, breaking out from time to time, was the unhappy occasion of marring their usefulness, and creating internal discord in the Church.

This course of probation was too long and tedious for the patience of many to submit to, and various expedients were adopted, by procuring testimonies to their deep contrition and genuine piety, to hasten their return to the bosom of the Church. The high character of the confessors of Christ, pointed them out as the most promising channel through which to apply for such an indulgence; and as the extraordinary veneration in which they were held rendered it extremely improbable that any request of theirs would be denied by their Christian brethren who bore rule in the Church, it became a common practice for the lapsed to get petitions for their restoration written out and signed by some well-known martyr, who was lying in prison or labouring in the mines. The first trace of this practice occurs about the year 260, and it originated in the anxiety of an African confessor about the restoration of his two sisters, who had unhappily given way and consented to sacrifice. Celerinus—that was the name of the confessor—was thrown into a state of inconsolable grief at the apostasy of the young women. Day and night he wept-abstained from food, shunned all society, and was rapidly pining away, when the thought occurred to him to solicit the friendly offices of Lucian, who was confined in the dungeons of Carthage, and daily expecting martyrdom. Having found means of conveying a message to the venerable martyr, he apprized him of the unhappy fall of his sisters, gave him ample proofs of their sincere repentance and Christian benevolence, and besought him, as an honoured confessor of Christ, to use his influence in procuring a remission of the sentence, which doomed the fallen women to exclusion for years from the privileges of the Church. The kindliness or the vanity of Lucian induced him to grant the request, and Celerinus, furnished with a recommendatory letter from the imprisoned martyr, carried it to the rulers of the Church, who, seeing the handwriting and the signature of a man so revered as Lucian was, accepted the testimonial, and, without any farther inquiry, promised Celerinus the satisfaction of his sisters' immediate readmission to the Church. * An expedient, so convenient at a time when the number of apostates was very numerous, and the strict rules of primitive purity required the lapse of several years before such persons could be restored, soon met with extensive imitation. And we find the excellent and uncompromising Cyprian complaining, in strong language, of the great abuses that, in his neighbourhood, sprang from it. The Church was deluged with recommendations too readily and indiscreetly furnished by confessors. Some of the lapsed there were, indeed, who, penetrated with sorrow for their apostasy, refused to take advantage of the testimonials offered them through the too indulgent friendship of the martyrs. But the 432 TRIALS.

far greater number, feeling their situation as exiles from the communion of the Church both painful and degrading, eagerly caught at this short and easy method of making their peace; and among the multitudes who, in those days, had suffered in some way for the sake of Christ, it was not difficult to find some whose vanity or easy temper could be wrought upon to recommend persons whose anxiety was directed to so praiseworthy an object as a renewed connection with the Church. All prudent and reflecting men lamented the growth of this evil. But few had fortitude enough to speak out against it,—much less to resist recommendatory letters, to which, as coming from the hand of confessors and martyrs, more than ordinary respect was paid; so that the practice was suffered to continue, and became the source of grievous corruptions, especially as in time a general form of certificates was given in which a blank space was left for the individual who procured it to fill up with whatever name he pleased. *

The introduction of this custom alone—were other evidence wanting-is sufficient to prove the truth of a statement made in an earlier part of this volume, respecting the high esteem in which the martyrs were universally held. While they lay in prison they were frequently consulted on matters of difficulty, and their decision was implicitly bowed to as settling the con-If liberated, they were supported at the common expense. At death their portraits were hung up in private houses, and, in process of time, they were introduced to adorn the walls of churches also, although nothing more was intended than, by familiarizing the eye with the features of the venerable dead, to keep alive in the minds of the beholders the memory of their deeds. Their acts, and the memorabilia of their closing scene, treasured up by tradition, or bought from the public archives, furnished a

^{*} Cyprian, Epist. 21.

never-failing source of interesting and instructive conversation in the family circles of the believers. This excessive regard for the character and memory of the martyrs was one of the greatest faults of the primitive Christians. It was undoubtedly natural for persons circumstanced as they were, who had themselves experienced some of the trials of persecuting times, and witnessed the holy boldness with which those stedfast champions of the truth met the horrors of the gloomy pyre, to embalm their names in never-dying remembrance. Nor would any evil, but much good, have resulted from this tribute of warm and affectionate admiration, as we know from the history of our own Church at periods of similar distraction, the intense interest that attaches to the name of martyrs, and how closely allied a regard for the memory of these conscientious men is with a sense of the value of Christian ordinances, and a disposition to uphold the cause of pure and undefiled religion. But among the primitive Christians, many of whom had not entirely shaken off the shackles of their heathen education, this amiable feeling of respect and admiration for departed worthies too nearly bordered on the higher sentiment of veneration. They were regarded as superior to the ordinary level of humanity, as endowed with an extraordinary effusion of the Spirit, and their sayings as possessed of an authority second only to that of Scripture. Where such extravagant honours were bestowed upon fallen and sinful, however excellent men, the transition was easy to idolatry; and, in the generous but unrestrained admiration of the primitive age, we trace the germs of that blind and superstitious reverence which, in after periods of ignorance and credulity, was directed towards the martyrs.

Another fault akin to the foregoing, and naturally arising out of it, was the immense value set upon martyrdom by some of the early Christians. The

434 TRIALS.

discipline of the primitive Church requiring a long preparation for baptism, many who had left idolatry were for years in a course of training for that initiatory ordinance. And none were considered perfect, or true Christians, till they had been washed in the waters of baptism. But if a person in that preparatory state had faith and fortitude enough to undergo martyrdom, that bloody baptism was considered as not only superseding, but of greater efficacy than the common and less costly mode, -as a peculiarly acceptable and meritorious act in the eye of the Saviour, and as a sure and direct passport to heaven. It was, perhaps, this peculiar style of thought and feeling, which originally created that strong desire for martyrdom, which other causes contributed to foster and perpetuate. A doom, however appalling, on which such inestimable blessings were supposed to hang, was courted rather than dreaded or shunned. Men were sometimes known to rush into the tribunals of the Roman governors, proclaiming themselves Christians; and although the best and most prudent leaders of the Church discouraged and condemned such a reckless exposure of themselves to the rage of persecution, no counsels, however wise, no authority, however commanding and venerable, was sufficient entirely to extinguish in the breasts of warm and enthusiastic Christians that longing to depart,—so long as they were possessed with the notion, that a few hours of suffering would secure the enjoyment of immediate and never-ending bliss. The prevalence of this unnatural and wild ambition is traceable in the intemperate language which some Christians employed at their trial, to provoke the judges to condemn them; and it is abundantly evident from the testimony of Eusebius, in whose passages there frequently occur such phrases as this, "by one short hour's endurance, they delivered themselves from eternal misery." But these views were far from being generally approved of, and although it suits the purpose of such writers as Gibbon, to impute the errors of a few to the charge of the whole body of Christians, yet, unless we believe there were no sound principles in the primitive age, and there is no confidence to be reposed in the testimony of the contemporary historians of the Church, the great majority of believers acted on the counsel of their Divine Master, and while they kept themselves in readiness to die for their faith, if called in providence to do so, they took every prudent precaution to save themselves from so violent a fate.

The trials to which the primitive Christians were exposed, were not more than had been predicted, and from the holy and spiritual nature of the Christian faith, what might have been expected. The introduction and establishment of a religion which waged uncompromising warfare against the corrupt institutions of idolatry, as well as the ungodliness of the human heart, could not have been accomplished without these trials as the portion of those who should be faithful to its cause in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Too long had Satan held the undisputed sway among the nations, to be willing to surrender his influence without a severe struggle, and hence we find that when that dominion was visibly waning, and Christianity making rapid strides towards the ascendant, his disappointment and rage burst forth into the madness of despair, as he saw the sceptre gradually departing from his hands. The priests of idolatry, who were his ministers, and the princes of the world, who were the slaves of their superstition, set every engine at work to root out the seed sown by the preaching of the Word. Finding that they could not uproot it, they suspended at intervals their weapons of war, in the hope that Christianity would be content with the footing she had obtained, but when they saw her still making alarming advances, and bidding fair 436 TRIALS.

for reaching a universal triumph, they again put on their armour, and took the field against the Christians. In this alternate course of jealous quiet, and active hostility, they continued for almost 300 years, when seeing this rival religion was carrying all before her, and that their own destruction was at hand, they resolved on a last desperate effort—it was a struggle for life; and hence, at no former period was the sword of persecution so drunk with the blood of God's servants as in the reign of Diocletian and his imperial colleagues. By those severe and protracted trials, however, which were the vials of wrath poured out on the Christians by the despairing friends of idolatry, Divine Providence accomplished the most important ends. The cause of Christ was proved, by incontestible evidence, to be the cause of God and truth. Amid the shades of obscurity and the sword of persecution, it was ushered into birth, and without power to patronise, learning to defend, or riches to dignify them in the eyes of the world, -nay, in spite of the most powerful obstacles, his disciples grew in number. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied,—thus proving that the progress of the Gospel was accomplished, not by human might nor power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.

Besides, these sufferings, which to so great an extent mark the history of the early believers, contributed under Providence to the fuller and more striking development of their rare virtues,—just as the stars shine brightest, and are seen to the greatest advantage, in the darkest night. Cast in the mould of the Gospel, the character of our first ancestors in the faith, would, in any circumstances, have presented the same elements of Christian excellence,—under whatever form of government, and in whatever state of society they had lived, they would have been the same pious and holy, the same meek and benevolent, the same patient and orderly people, that the sanctifying influ-

ence of Christianity made them. But in the ordinary peaceful course of events, and amid the vast wilderness of living men in the empire of Rome, their humble and unobtrusive habits would have prevented their excellencies from ever being known; and it is to the painful and harrowing circumstances in which they made profession of the faith, that the world is indebted at once for the discovery of their singular virtues, and for the full-blown maturity in which these were displayed. Had not calumny assailed their character, and excited universal odium against them, through the imputation of enormous crimes, we should never have possessed those admirable apologies, which draw so enchanting a picture of their pure and amiable society. Had not snares of every kind, and in the most insidious form, been laid for their fall, we should have been left in ignorance of their admirable stedfastness in religion and virtue. Had not the demon of persecution waved the sword and lighted the fires of extermination around them, we should have wanted the splendid examples which their dying scenes exhibited of meekness that was never ruffled, of patience that never heaved a groan, of forgiveness to men, and a hope in God that was strong in death. Nay, it is not the knowledge only of their extraordinary excellencies which we owe to the persecution that dragged them into fame—that same persecution unfolded the blossoms of their Christian virtue to a degree of beautiful and splendid maturity, which, in calmer and less trying circumstances, they would not have attained. Constantly in dread of danger from without, they were led to exercise an ever-vigilant care over the treasure of their faith within. Objects of ridicule and contempt, whenever they appeared, they were driven to the habitual practice of meekness. Persecuted, now by the tongue of defamation-now by the strong arm of violence, occasions were seldom wanting to call them to the duty of forgiving injuries. The wants of their

poorer brethren—the wretchedness of their heathen countrymen, both in their temporal and spiritual condition, presented objects for the exercise of their everactive benevolence. The difficulties from without, amid which all these dispositions and virtues were brought into play, gave a higher and more solemn tone to that devotion which was so distinguishing a feature of their character—and thus we can trace throughout the whole of their singular history, a mutual and most interesting connection between the Manners and the Trials of the primitive Christians.

THE END.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY JOHN JOHNSTONE, HIGH STREET.

SELECT

THEOLOGICAL WORKS,

PUBLISHED BY

JOHN JOHNSTONE, EDINBURGH;

R. GROOMBRIDGE, AND J. NISBET & CO., LONDON; AND W. CURRY, JUNR., & CO., DUBLIN.

- A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOT-LAND. By the Rev. W. M. HETHERINGTON, A.M., Minister of Torphichen. Svo. cloth, price 10s. 6d.
- SKETCHES OF SCOTTISH CHURCH HISTORY, embracing the period from the Reformation to the Revolution. By the Rev. Thomas M'Crie. With an Appendix relative to the alleged accession of John Knox to the Conspiracy against Riccio. In fcap. Svo. cloth, price 6s. 6d.
- A CONCISE SYSTEM OF THEOLOGY:
 Being the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly
 of Divines Analyzed and Explained. By ALEXANDER
 SMITH PATERSON, A.M., Author of a "History of the
 Church." With a Paper on the History and Arrangement
 of the Shorter Catechism; by the Rev. Duncan MacfarLan, Minister of Renfrew. Fcap. 8vo., price 4s. 6d.
- MEMOIRS OF CHRISTIAN FEMALES; with an Essay on the Influences of Female Piety. By the Rev. James Gardner, A.M., M.D. Second Edition, in foolscap 8vo, with an Elegant Portrait of Mrs Hannah More, price 4s. 6d.
- SOLITUDE SWEETENED. By J. Meikle, late Surgeon, Carnwath. With a Biographical Sketch of the Author. Foolscap Svo. cloth, price 3s. 6d.
- MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS, Chiefly Historical, of the late Thomas M'Crie, D.D. Edited by his Son. In Svo. cloth, price 10s. 6d.

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS: A Course of Lectures delivered in Edinburgh, by Ministers of the Church of Scotland. To which is appended, the Statement submitted to the General Assembly, by Alex. Black, D.D., Professor of Divinity in Marischal College and University, Aberdeen, and one of the Deputation sent to Palestine by the Assembly. Fcap. 8vo. cloth, 2s. 6d.

AFRICAN LIGHT THROWN ON A SELECTION OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS. By the late Rev. John Camprell, Kingsland, Author of "Travels in Africa," &c. Second Edition, with a Biographical Sketch of the Author. 18mo. 2s. 6d.

BIOGRAPHY.

MEMOIR, WITH SELECT REMAINS, OF THE LATE JAMES HALLEY, A.B., Student of Theology. Fcap. 8vo. cl., pp. 382, with Portrait, 5s.

LIFE OF THOMAS M'CRIE, D.D., Author of "Life of John Knox," &c., &c. By his Son, the Rev. Thomas M'Crie. Demy 8vo. 9s. cloth, with highly finished Portrait by Horsburgh.

"We cannot but express our deep conviction of the excellence, and of the fidelity and ability with which the author has executed the 'Life of Dr M'Crie.' For generations to come, it will be found of value to the Church, not alone as recording the memoirs of one of her eminent standard-bearers, but as exhibiting lucid views of one part of her contendings and sufferings for the testimony of Jesus."—Covenanter.

MEMOIRS OF MRS WILSON OF BOMBAY;

including Extracts from her Letters and Journals. By the Rev. John Wilson, D.D., M.R.A.S., Missionary of the Church of Scotland, Bombay. Third Edit., 7s. 6d., cl. "We have no hesitation in saying that this is one of the most delightful, and what is far better, one of the most valuable pieces of Christian Biography which has appeared in our day."—Guardian.

MEMOIR OF THE LATE MRS PATERSON,

Wife of the Rev. Dr Paterson, St Petersburg, containing Extracts from her Diary and Correspondence. By the Rev. William Swan, Missionary at Sellingisk. Second Edition. 12mo. 3s. 6d. boards.

MEMOIRS OF THE REV. ELIAS CORNE-

LIUS, Secretary to the American Education Society.

By B. B. Edwards. 12mo. 3s. cloth.

"Our limits forbid us to extend our notice of this interesting volume. Mr Cornelius' great models were Brainerd and Martyn, and his exertions were not inferior."—Presbyterian Review.

MEMOIRS OF THE REV. PLINY FISK,

A.M., late Missionary to Palestine, from the American Board of Missions. 12mo. with Portrait, 5s. bds.

"This is in some respects the most interesting piece of biographical record that has been given to the public since

the Memoir of Henry Martyn."—Eclectic Review.

"The tender passages which Mr Fisk penned, on visiting those spots in Jerusalem and Canaan which had been consecrated by the person of our adorable Saviour, must be read, to enjoy the tender and hallowed sympathy which the missionary's descriptions can hardly fail to excite."— Baptist Magazine.

MEMOIR OF THE REV. LEVI PARSONS,

Companion of the Rev. PLINY FISK, Missionary to Pales-

tine. 18mo. 3s. cloth.

"In perusing this Memoir, the reader is brought into intimate converse with a mind under the deep and sanctifying impressions of religion, and made acquainted with the joys and sorrows, the elevations and depressions, of one to whom sin appeared in all its bitterness and deformity, and to whom also the consolations of the Gospel had been manifested in all their fulness, and in all their suitableness."—Presbyterian Magazine.

MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE, CHARACTER, and WRITINGS of the late Rev. PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D.D. By Job Orton; with an Introductory Essay by DAVID RUSSELL, D.D., Dundee. 18mo. 2s. 6d. cloth.

LIFE OF THE REV. JAMES RENWICK, the last of the Scottish Martyrs. By the Author of the History of the Covenanters. 18mo. 2s. cloth.

"We would willingly give many extracts from this volume, but it will do the reader more service to persuade him to peruse the whole at length."—Presbyterian Review.

SKETCHES IN BIOGRAPHY, designed to show the Influences of Literature on Character and Happiness. By John Clayton, Esq. 12mo. 5s. cloth.

"To young persons possessed of a classical taste, this volume will present resistless charms. It is decidedly the best written thing of the kind that has found its way into our hands."—Ecangelical Magazine.

CHURCH HISTORY.

AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE PRO-

TESTANT CHURCH OF FRANCE, from its Origin down to the Present Day; with parallel Notices of the History of the Church of Scotland during the same period. By the Rev. J. G. LORIMER, Minister of St David's Parish, Glasgow. Foolscap 8vo. 6s. 6d. cloth.

"We are certain that the copious information collected by Mr Lorimer was never collected in English or in any other language before. In compiling what belongs to the 'subject proper,' he has consulted the best accessible sources; and the materials for the history of his own Church have been obtained, at least a good deal of them, from Presbytery Records, Wodrow's MSS., and books of antiquarian clubs, which are inaccessible except to the students of Church History."— Christian Instructor.

ANNALS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND, from the Final Secession in 1739, to the Rejection of the Overture on Schism in 1776. With APPENDICES of Biographical Sketches, Illustrative Documents, and Notes. By the Rev. N. Morren, A. M., Minister of the North Church, Greenock. 2 vols. 12mo. 10s. cloth.

[Each Volume is complete in itself, and may be had separately, price 5s.]

"We call the attention of ministers and elders to the high claims which these Annals present to their liberal patronage. We can assure them that they will derive from their perusal much curious and valuable information. They will, besides, be led, as it were, behind the scenes, while they will feel themselves placed, at the same time, in the midst of successive Assemblies, hearing the debates, and conversing with the speakers."—Christian Instructor.

MANNERS AND TRIALS OF THE PRIMI-

TIVE CHRISTIANS. By the Rev. Robert Jameson, Minister of Currie. Second Edition, fcap. Svo. 5s. cloth.

"Mr Jamieson has consulted the authorities necessary to have enabled him to perform his task in an efficient way, and his work is one well calculated for a course as popular as the 'Pilgrim's Progress.' The extraordinary nature of the facts, and the extent and variety of the matter, cannot fail to make a deep impression on the minds of every class of readers, and his volume a fireside and family favourite."—Literary Gazette.

ANTIQUITIES OF THE JEWS; carefully Compiled from authentic sources, and their Customs Illustrated from Modern Travels. With Engravings. By the late William Brown, D. D., Minister of Eskdalemuir. Second Edition, 2 vols. Svo. 12s. cloth.

"Whoever wishes to understand the connection between the Old and New Testament, or, in other words, to realize the Jewish Economy as the living harbinger of the Gospel Dispensation, will do well to study Dr Brown's learned and elaborate work. It is, in one word, an encyclopædia of Jewish antiquities, which will not, with propriety, admit either of enlargement or diminution."—Christian Repository.

HISTORY OF THE COVENANTERS IN

SCOTLAND. By WILLIAM SIME, Esq., Author of the "Histories of the Reformation," "Christian Church," "Waldenses." Dedicated, by permission, to the Rev. Dr M'Crie. 2 vols. 18mo. 7s. cloth.

"We cordially recommend this work, expressing the hope that parents will put it into the hands of their children, that the ministers of the Presbyterian Churches will urge an acquaintance with it upon the candidates for admission to membership, and that the friends of pure and undefiled religion and civil liberty generally, will promote its circulation."—The Covenanter.

VIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND. By the late George Hill, D.D., Principal of St Mary's College, St Andrews. With Appendix and Notes. By Alexander Hill, D.D., Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow. Third Edition, 12mo. 3s. 6d. cloth.

MISSIONS.

INDIA AND INDIA MISSIONS; including Sketches of the Gigantic System of Hinduism, both in Theory and Practice; also, Notices of some of the Principal Agencies employed in conducting the process of Indian Evangelization, &c. By Alexander Duff, D.D., Church of Scotland Mission, Calcutta. Second Edition, 12s. cloth.

"'India and India Missions' will take a high place in the Christian Literature, not merely of the day but of the age, and greatly extend the missionary spirit and zeal of the

country."—Guardian.

By the same Author.

I. MISSIONS THE CHIEF END OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH; also, the Qualifications, Duties, and Trials of an Indian Missionary. Fourth Edition, fcap. 8vo. 2s. 6d.

"We recommend it to universal perusal. It is saying little to say that it is first-rate, for nothing more enlightened, ardent, eloquent, heart-stirring, can be produced. We entreat every minister and elder of the Church, as well as Christians generally, to make a point of possessing themselves of a copy."-Scottish Guardian.

II. BOMBAY IN APRIL 1840, with Special Reference to the Church of Scotland's Mission there. 8vo. 6d.

- III. FEMALE EDUCATION IN INDIA; being the Substance of an Address delivered at the First Annual Meeting of the Scottish Ladies' Association, in connection with the Church of Scotland, for the Promotion of Female Education in India. Second Edition, 8vo. 6d.
- IV. FAREWELL ADDRESS on the Subject of the Church of Scotland's India Mission; delivered before the General Assembly of the Church, May 1839. Third Edition,
- V. NEW ERA OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE in INDIA; or, an Exposition of the late Governor-General of India's last Act, relative to the Promotion of European Literature and Science, through the medium of the English Language, amongst the Natives of that Populous and Extensive Province of the British Empire. 8vo. 8d.

VI. THE MUTUAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE; a Sermon, preached on Sabbath, September 4, 1836, in the South Parish Church, Aberdeen. Second Edition, 8vo. 1s.

DR DUFF'S WORKS-continued.

VII. The CHURCH of SCOTLAND'S INDIA MISSION; or, a Brief Exposition of the Principles on which that Mission has been conducted in Calcutta. Second Edition, 8vo. 6d.

VIII. A VINDICATION OF THE CHURCH OF SCOT-LAND'S INDIA MISSIONS. Second Edition, 8vo. 6d.

IX. EXTRACT OF A LETTER RESPECTING THE WRECK OF THE LADY HOLLAND, East Indiaman, in which Vessel the Rev. Dr Duff was a Passenger. 8vo. 6d.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE EXTENSION AND PRESENT CONDITION OF THE SCOTTISH CHURCH IN INDIA, and on the Mission of the Church of Scotland in that country. By the Rev. Joseph Laurie, D.D., Senior Chaplain of St Andrew's Church, Bombay. 8vo. 1s.

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES.

MESSIAH THE PRINCE; or, The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ. By the Rev. WILLIAM SYMINGTON, D.D., Glasgow. Second Edition, foolscap Svo. 5s. cloth.

"The characteristics of this work are clearness of statement, methodical distinctness of arrangement, solidity of argument without show, and a remarkable tact in appropriate scriptural quotation and reference."—Christian Instructor.

A DEMONSTRATION OF THE TRUE AND ETERNAL DIVINITY of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. By DIONYSIUS VAN DE WYNPERSSE, D.D., late Professor of Philosophy, Mathematics, and Astronomy at Leyden. Second Edition, translated from the Dutch; containing an Introduction, Appendix, Notes and Illustrations, by WILLIAM L. ALEXANDER, A.M. 18mo. 2s. 6d. cloth.

"Among the works (on the person of Christ) which are entitled to all the commendations which are due to ability and learning, to sound judgment, fair reasoning, and Christian temper, a high place is due to Dr Van Wynpersse's Essay on the Divinity of Jesus Christ."—Pye Smith's Script. Test., vol. i. p. 4.

A SHORT AND EASY METHOD WITH THE

DEISTS, wherein the Certainty of the Christian Religion is Demonstrated, by Infallible Proofs, from Four Rules. By the Rev. Charles Leslie, A.M. A New Edition, with an Introductory Essay by David Russell, D.D., Dundee. 18mo. 2s. 6d. cloth.

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. By ARCHIBALD

ALEXANDER, D.D., Professor of Theology in the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, United States, A.M. 12mo. 1s. cloth.

"The small volume which bears the above title, may be considered as valuable a treatise on this all-important topic, as has issued from the press for many years; and we may venture to assert, that men who have hitherto felt a total indifference on the subject of religion, by reading this little Essay with attention, must irresistibly feel a degree of conviction of its divine truth which he will find difficult to shake off."—Glasgow Courier.

THE NATURE, REALITY, AND EFFI-

CACY OF THE ATONEMENT. By the Rev. Daniel Dewar, D.D., Principal of Marischal College and University, Aberdeen. Second Edition, 12mo. 7s. 6d. boards.

"This Volume contains a masterly defence of the orthodox faith on this momentous subject. We can with confidence recommend it to Students of Divinity, to perplexed inquirers, and to private Christians in general, as a candid, elaborate, and spirited defence of the truth as it is in Jesus."—Evangelical Magazine.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE GENERAL EVIDENCE ESTABLISHING THE REALITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION. By GEORGE COOK, D.D., F.R.S.E., Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of St Andrews. Second Edition, 12mo. 4s. cloth.

"The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact; our resurrection is a doctrine. Admit the fact, and the doctrine cannot be denied. The ascension of Jesus Christ is another fact; his return from thence to judge the world is a doctrine; if the fact be true, the doctrine must be so likewise. For, argues the apostle, if the doctrine be not true, the fact must be false; if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised."—

Jones of Nayland.

- AN INQUIRY INTO THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By the late John Cook, D.D., Professor of Divinity in St Mary's College, St Andrews. Svo. 9s. boards.
- CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY; or, A Connected View of the Scheme of Christianity. By the Rev. James Esdaile, D.D., Perth. 8vo. 5s. cloth.
- GRACE AND TRUTH; or, the Glory and Fullness of the Redeemer displayed; in an Attempt to Illustrate and Enforce the Most Remarkable Types, Figures and Allegories of the Old Testament. By the late Rev. William M'EWEN, Minister of the Gospel, Dundee. 18mo. 2s. 6d. cloth.

By the same Author,

- SELECT ESSAYS upon DOCTRINAL and PRACTICAL SUBJECTS. New edition, 12mo. 3s. 6d. cloth.
- SCRIPTURE CHRONOLOGY, in accordance with the Hebrew Text; wherein the Dates given of the leading events, between the Creation and the Birth of Christ, are clearly and satisfactorily proved to be the true Dates. By James Macfarlane, Perth. 12mo. 2s. 6d. cloth.
- "This Work is well calculated to throw light upon many important points connected with the most remarkable epochs in the history of the human race, as well as to afford interesting and useful information to the general reader, who is desirous of tracing the series of events which connect the origin of our species with the period of man's redemption."—Dr Anderson, Professor of Natural Philosophy, St Andrews.

OH AFFLICTION.

- THE AFFLICTED'S REFUGE; or, Prayers
 Adapted to Various Circumstances of Distress. Foolscap
 Syo. 2s. 6d. cloth.
- "To the afflicted, and the mourners in Zion, we recommend this volume as peculiarly adapted to their condition, and as likely to furnish them with suitable topics and language, should they feel their own inability to pray in appropriate terms. Here they may find simplicity, unction and fervour, connected with such diction as their ideas desire to give them utterance."—Orthodox Presbyterian.

COMFORT IN AFFLICTION; A Series of Meditations. By the Rev. James Buchanan, one of the Ministers of the High Church, Edinburgh. Ninth Edition, foolscap 8vo. 3s. 6d. cloth, lettered.

"See this subject ('Blessed Results of Affliction') treated with peculiar force of argument, and felicity of expression—strong in scriptural statements of divine truth, and rich in scriptural sources of divine consolation—in a most valuable work, entitled 'Comfort in Affliction: by the Rev. James Buchanan, North Leith,'—which I would affectionately recommend to every Christian mourner who desires to drink freely of the refreshing streams which the Fountain of all Comfort—the Word of God, supplies; for it is from this sacred source the pious and talented author of this excellent work derives 'Comfort in Affliction,' which his pages so eloquently and attractively set forth."—Extract from the Rev. Hugh White's (of Dublin) Meditations.

By the same Author,

IMPROVEMENT OF AFFLICTION; A Practical Sequel to a Series of Meditations, entitled "Comfort in Affliction." Fourth Edition, foolscap 8vo. 3s. 6d.

"By the mere man of taste Mr Buchanan has been appreciated for the elegance of his diction and the felicity of his expression; by the divine he has been admired for the depth and soundness of his theology; and by the Christian, but more especially by the afflicted Christian, he has been valued, nay loved, for the light and comfort which he has been made instrumental in pouring upon his disturbed mind, and into his troubled spirit."—Scottish Guardian.

SORROWING YET REJOICING; or, Narrative of Recent Successive Bereavements in a Clergyman's Family. By the Rev. Alex. Beith, Stirling. Fourth Edition, 1s. 6d. cloth.

"It is written with the utmost simplicity, and is pervaded throughout by a tone of the most evangelical devotion. Its tale is told in language the most scriptural and touching, whilst it gives an index to the happy and composed state of the author's own feelings, amid the most trying, and, to nature, overwhelming bereavements. It is peculiarly valuable, as presenting the most striking examples of the work and power of grace on the youthful and the infant mind, and the process by which Jesus sanctifies and purifies the souls of the lambs of his flock, before they are taken to be with him in glory."—Guardian.

OF MOURNING. By the Rev. DAVID MITCHELL, Pulteneytown, Wick. 18mo. 1s. 6d. cloth.

PRACTICAL RELIGION.

CARDIPHONIA; or, Utterance of the Heart, in the Course of a Real Correspondence. By the Rev. John Newton. With an Introductory Essay, by David Russell, D.D., Dundee. Foolscap Svo. 4s. 6d. cloth.

By the same Author.

TWENTY-FIVE LETTERS. Never before Published. 18mo. 1s. 6d. cloth.

"It would be quite superfluous to say a word in commendation of the character, usefulness, or piety of that extraordinary man, John Newton. He is too well known to require description, and too much admired and venerated to need eulogy. The letters now for the first time published, were addressed to a father and son of the name of Jones, respectable merchants in Hull, and members of the Independent Church. They bear the genuine impress of the strong, masculine mind of Newton, and exhibit much of that self-abasement and humility which pervade his other writings."—
Orthodox Presbyterian.

ESSENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS WHEN ENTERING ON THE ACTIVE PERIOD OF LIFE. Adapted for Sabbath School Libraries. 2s. 6d. cloth.

"The strain of warm and unaffected piety which runs through this little work, and its many appropriate and impressive suggestions of essential duties and considerations, render it very fit for being put into the hands of young persons, and for a place in all Sabbath School Libraries. The style is exceedingly simple and earnest, well fitted both to attract and to solemnize the youthful reader."—Witness.

By the same Author.

- I. THE GOOD SERVANT, and other Tracts; or, Examples and Warnings for Persons in Humble Life. Third Edition, 2s. 6d. cloth.
- II. THE APPRENTICE'S MONITOR; containing Examples and Warnings. 2s. 6d. cloth.
- III. SIX LECTURES TO CHILDREN. 6d.

THE WORLD'S RELIGION, as contrasted with Genuine Christianity. By LADY COLQUHOUN, daughter of the late Right Hon. Sir John Sinelair, Bart. Second Edition, foolscap 8vo. 3s. 6d. cloth.

"Mr Phin's time was now much occupied in devotional reading; and, after the Word of God, he seemed to relish nothing so much as the works of Lady Colquhoun; of which he expressed a very high opinion for their spirituality. 'The religion of many books,' he said, 'appeared to be elaborated by study, and by borrowing from other books, but hers bore the clearest marks of being derived from a throne of grace.' The last work which he read, if I mistake not, was 'The World's Religion;' and he prized it highly, for insisting so much upon the inward, peculiar experiences of the Christian,—his feeding upon the 'hidden manna,' and his possessing the white stone,' and 'the new name, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it.'"—Memoir of Rev. R. Phin of Wick.

By the same Author.

- THE KINGDOM OF GOD, as to its Nature and Subjects. 12mo. 3s. 6d. cloth.
- II. IMPRESSIONS OF THE HEART, re ative to the Nature and Excellency of Genuine Religion. Second Edition, 12mo. 3s. cloth.
- III. DESPAIR AND HOPE; exemplified in a Narrative founded on fact. Second Edition, 18mo. 6d. stitched.

INWARD REVIVAL; or, Motives and Hindrances to Advancement in Holiness. By the Rev. James Marshall, Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh. Foolscap Svo. 4s. 6d. cloth.

"We have perused Mr Marshall's book with much satisfaction, and, we hope, profit; and we cordially recommend it as a refreshing draught to the soul that is thirsting for the

water of life." - Christian Instructor.

THE FOUNDATION of CHRISTIAN HOPE;

being a Plain and Impartial Inquiry after a Safe Ground of Confidence for a Sinful Creature at the Bar of God. By the Rev. Edward Craig, A.M., of St Edmund Hall, Oxon. Fifth Edition, 32mo. 1s. cloth.

By the same Author.

CHRISTIAN CIRCUMSPECTION; a brief View of the Duty of Christians to preserve themselves pure from the irreligious customs of this world. Fifth Edition, 18mo. 1s. stitched.

SERMONS by ROBERT GORDON, D.D., one of the Ministers of the High Church, Edinburgh. Fourth Edition, 8vo. 10s. Ed. cloth.

"These are orations, these are arguments, worthy of a very high and permanent place in our theological literature. They display a vigour and originality of thought, which it is truly refreshing to meet with in printed Sermons, and are, at the same time, boldly explicit in the enunciation of the Gospel system."—Eclectic Review.

AND MINOR THEOLOGICAL SERMONS PIECES; to which are added LETTERS on AFFLIC-TION, never before published. By the late Rev. John CAMPBELL, D.D., Minister of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh. To which is prefixed, a Sermon, Preached on the occasion of his death; by the Rev. Robert Lorimer, LL.D., one of the Ministers of Haddington. Second Edition, 9s. cloth lettered.

LORD'S SUFFER.

A TREATISE ON THE SACRAMENTS OF BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER. By JOHN

CALVIN. Foolscap 8vo. 2s. 6d. cloth.

"This is a solid contribution to theology, and one which, from its terseness of style, cannot fail to be widely appreciated by the religious public, -a consummation most devoutly to be wished, as too great a portion of the works of this great man have hitherto been erroneously esteemed as accessible only to the mere student."- Theological Magazine.

A DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL TREA-

TISE ON THE LORD'S SUPPER; comprehending copious illustrations of the leading Doctrines of the Gospel, and of the leading Duties and varied Experience of the Christian Life. By the Rev. JAMES GRIERSON, Minister of Errol. Foolscap 8vo. 3s. 6d. cloth.

"With a clear and vigorous style, a distinct and proper arrangement, it combines sound views of divine truth, and a full and faithful exhibition of the peculiar doctrines of the

Gospel."—Guardian.

REMEMBRANCE REMEMBERED; being the Substance of a Communion Service. By the Rev. WILLIAM SIMPSON, A.M., Minister of Leith Wynd Church, Edinburgh. 18mo. 1s. 6d. cloth.

A MEMORIAL concerning Personal and Family Fasting and Humiliation, presented to Saints and Sinners; wherein also the Nature of Personal Covenanting with God is occasionally opened. By the Rev. Thomas Boston, Minister of the Gospel at Ettrick. With Prefatory Remarks by the Rev. Alexander Moody Stuart, A.M., Minister of St Luke's, Edinburgh. 18mo. 1s. cloth.

"The preface is a valuable addition to this little work, which, were no other copy to be had, would be worth its weight in gold."—Watchman.

NARRATIVES AND MISCELLANEOUS.

THE MINISTER'S FAMILY. By the Rev. W.

M. HETHERINGTON, A.M., Minister of Torphichen. Third

Edition, with Beautiful Frontispiece, 5s. cloth.

"This is a charming volume, and to say that we are pleased with it would be far less praise than we are disposed to award. It is a narrative of thrilling interest, and we believe that few will be inclined to rise from its perusal without entirely finishing it, so deep is the interest with which the writer has contrived to surround the whole."—Inverness Herald.

BIBLE NARRATIVES FOR THE YOUNG.

By a CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER. 32mo. 1s. 6d. cloth.

"It is a serious error in modern education, to banish the Bible from the nursery, and to imagine that the sensibilities of its inmates can only be aroused by fictitious narratives. For pathos, interest, and simplicity, what stories can vie with the Narratives of the Bible?"—Knox's Essays.

THE BORDER REBEL; or, Disobedient Son:

a Narrative of the year 1745, founded on facts; with an Application, containing an admonition to youth. With

elegant frontispiece, 1s. 6d. cloth.

"This plain, simple, and affecting story, is admirably calculated to inculcate a moral admonition to youth, as it strikingly depicts the awful consequences that may arise from breaches, however slight, of the fifth commandment. The applications drawn from the facts narrated evince the judicious zeal of its excellent author, and speak at once to the feelings and the judgment of the reader. Parents could not place a more appropriate tale in the hands of their children, or one likelier to yield so rich a harvest of useful results."—Caledonian Mercury.

AYRSHIRE SKETCHES; or, Memoirs of Jeanie Charters, Hugh Cunninghame, and James Baird. By the Rev. D. Landsborough, Minister of Stevenston. 18mo. 6d. stitched.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIETY BY THE DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE; or, An Illustration of the Advantages which would result from a more general Dissemination of Rational and Scientific Information among all ranks. Illustrated with Engravings. By Thomas Dick, LL.D., Author of "The Christian Philosopher," &c. Second Edition, 12mo. 7s. 6d.

"Dr Dick's 'Improvement of Society by the Diffusion of Knowledge' is a valuable volume."—Spectator.

JEPHTHAH; or, the Maid of Gilead. Foolscap Svo. 3s. 6d. cloth.

ASSOCIATION; OR, THE PROGRESS OF FEELING; A Poem, in Four Books. By Geo. Garloch, A.M., Minister of Meldrum. 12mo. 3s. 6d. cloth.

"The author has evidently cultivated the spirit of genuine poetry, and with it that of philosophy and true religion."— Evangelical Magazine.

By the same Author.

SERMONS, DOCTRINAL AND PRACTICAL. Svo. 6s. cloth.

ON CRUELTY TO ANIMALS. By JAMES MACAULAY, A. M. and M. D. Edinburgh University Prize Essay. Foolscap 8vo. 2s. 6d. cloth.

CATECHISMS, &c., FOR SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

Anderson's Catechism of the Lord's Prayer. Price 2d. Andrew's Catechism on the Old and New Testament. Price 1s.

Bagot's Protestant Catechism. Price 6d.

Catechism of the Truths of the Gospel. Price 2d. Brown's Shorter Catechism for Young Children. Price 1d. Burns' (of Kilsyth) Essay and Address on Family Worship. Price 2d.

Esdaile's Geography of the Holy Land. Price 4d. Ferrie's Catechism of the Evidences of Revealed Religion. Price 2d.

Fifty Questions on the Leading Doctrines and Duties of the Gospel. Price 1d.

Hamilton's Assembly's Shorter Catechism. Price 1 d. Lee's Address to those who Seldom or Never go to Church. Price 2d.

— Catechism of the Truths of Christianity. Price 2d.
Miller's Catechism of the Gospel of St Matthew. Price 8d.
M'Leod's Ecclesiastical Catechism. Price 6d.

Popular Constitution of the Church of Scotland. Fifth Edition. Price 1d.

Russell's Catechism of the Holy Scriptures. Price 6d. Scheme of the Controversy on Baptism. Second Thousand. Price 1d.

Stark's Epitome of Holy Scripture. Price 1d. Steele's Manual of the Christian Evidences. Price 1s. Willison's Mother's Catechism. Price 1d.

PERIODICALS,

SCOTTISH CHRISTIAN HERALD; Con-

ducted under the superintendence of Ministers and Members of the Established Church. Each Number contains Sixteen Pages, Imperial Octavo, of closely printed matter. Price Three Halfpence.

Also in Monthly Parts, Price Eightpence, published on the last Saturday of each month, for the convenience of being forwarded along with the Magazines, and other Periodicals, in the monthly parcels; each Part containing either Five Numbers, or (where the month does not contain five Saturdays) Four Numbers and a Supplement. This Supplement consists of Ecclesiastical Intelligence, Obituaries, Appointments, Calls, Ordinations, and the most important topics relating to the passing events of the day, in so far as they affect the progress of religion.

HOME AND FOREIGN MISSIONARY RECORD FOR THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND; by Authority of the Committees of the General Assembly. Published on the 1st day of each month. Price Threepence, unstamped; and Fourpence, stamped and sent by post.

** The Committees make the Record their stated and ordinary channel of advertising contributions and collections, and in general, employ this Journal exclusively in communicating with the Church and the Public.



Date Due

M 56 3.		
10 1 3 0 2 2 CV		
	·	



